THRILLING WONDER STORIES

FEATURED NOVELETS

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By HENRY KUTTNER

THE WEARIEST RIVER
By WALLACE WEST

NEW BODIES FOR OLD
By JACK VANCE

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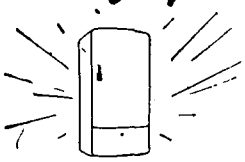

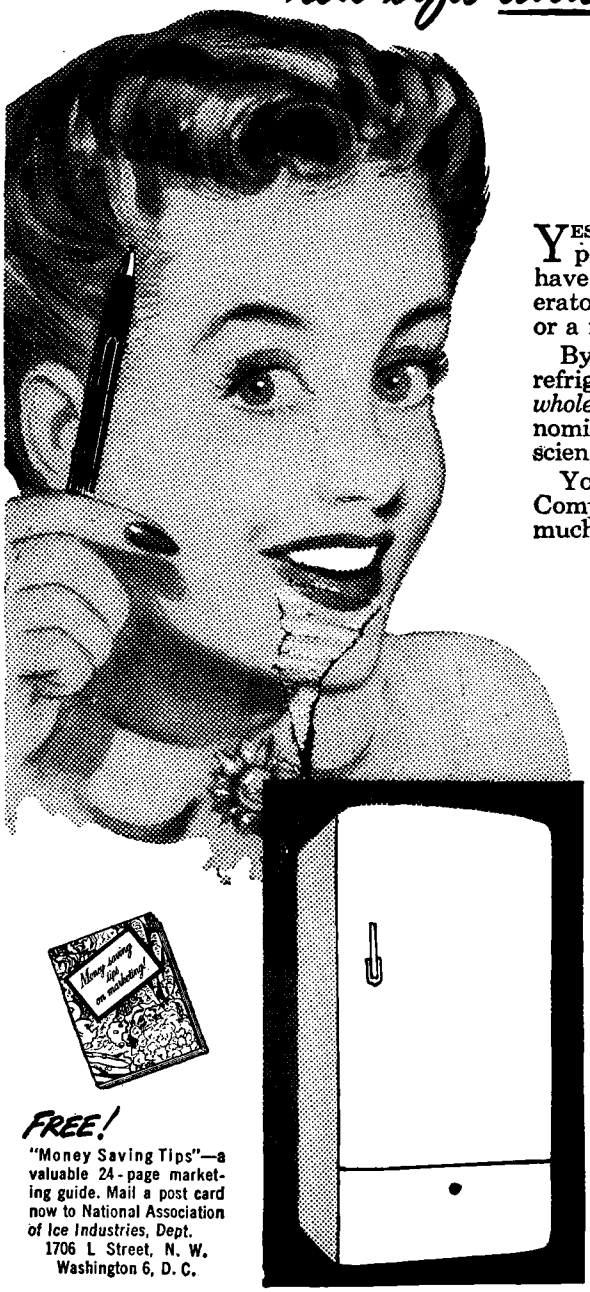

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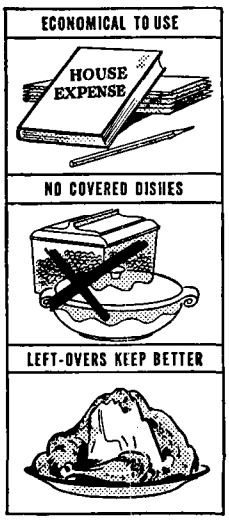

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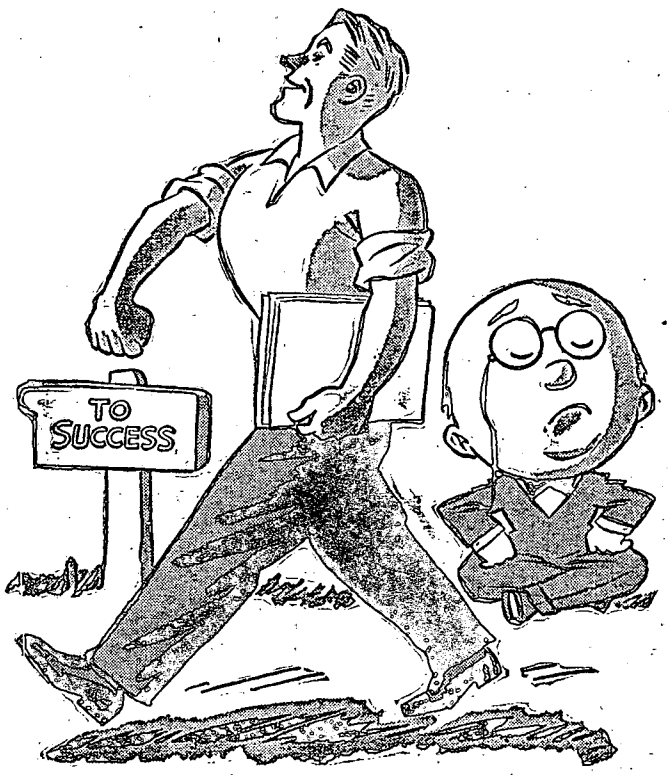
How to pass a genius



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THRILLING WONDER STORIES

VOL. XXXVI, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION August 1950

Featured Complete Novelet

AS YOU WERE

By HENRY KUTTNER

On a pendulum of space and time, Peter Owen swings back to yesterday as he frantically attempts to find a "tomorrow" worth living! 9

Two Other Complete Novelets

NEW BODIES FOR OLD ..... Jack Vance 46

Strange and baffling are the ways of the Chateau d'If, where human forms and personalities are made the stuff of barter!

THE WEARIEST RIVER ..... Wallace West 104

Professor Elisha Gordon turns time backward for his four prize pupils when the world totters on the brink of destruction and ruin!

Short Stories

BATTLING BOLTO ..... L. Ron Hubbard 84

When a man apes a robot, he's asking for some electronic grief

SPACEMATE ..... Walt Sheldon 93

All regulations were violated when Jim Beckwith fell for Nurse Myra

A WALK IN THE DARK ..... Arthur C. Clarke 134

Fear and misfortune stalk the strange byways of a lonely planet

Special Feature

THE ROUND-THE-WORLD BOMBER ..... Willy Ley 99

The Nazis didn't bomb New York—but they had their blueprints ready!

Features

THE READER SPEAKS ..... The Editor 6

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW ..... A Department 157

THE FRYING PAN ..... A Fanzine Commentary 159

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

WELL, we're finally going to talk about them. After reading several hundred accounts of their appearances in the past four years, after hearing them discussed almost continually over the same period and after regarding them with everything from cynical amusement to rank suspicion, we're going to say what *we* think about them.

We have yet to see a Flying Saucer. None has yet appeared over the densely-populated northeastern corner of the country. But they have been reported too many times in too many places over too long a period to be dismissed as fiction. We believe they exist.

We may, of course, be wrong to the point of the ridiculous. But a considerable body of fact and a very little reading between the lines of material already published about the Saucers give us a fairly sound foundation in logic if not in proven fact.

Out on a Limb?

For all we know the real Saucer story may have broken before this editorial sees print. If it does we're going to be shown up as a sound student of current events or as an unsound prophet out on a limb. Well, it won't be the first time we've sawed ourselves off, so here goes. . . .

We believe that the so-called Saucers are a new and utterly different type of aircraft developed in all probability by the United States Air Forces and kept in the top-secret category for obvious politico-security reasons.

There has been, of course, a great deal of honest misapprehension as well as downright chicanery involved in the Flying Saucer story, at least from the point of view of the uninformed onlooker—a point of view which includes ourselves as well as almost all the rest of you.

Undoubtedly those weather-observation balloons, the daytime moon, circular cloud formations and sundry other air-borne objects have been mistaken for the discs. Unidentified fragments of various substances found on the ground have been held as wreckage of the Saucers until correctly labeled as more prosaic items. And as always, when something so eerie and so utterly unexplained is tossed to the public fancy, there have been some weird rumors flying about.

Grasping at Straws

For awhile, during the early Saucer furor, we were reminded of a tale which was universally accepted in Great Britain during the first days of World War One, when the Allied armies were being rolled back to the Marne by the massive Schlieffen Plan assault of the Kaiser's forces.

War hysteria was at fever peak and a lot of people thought that no forces were available to stop the German juggernaut. The British public, unable to conceive of total defeat, was ready and willing to grasp at straws.

So it was said that 40,000 Russian troops had successfully run the German Baltic blockade to Scotland, had been trainshipped the length of England to Dover and there embarked across the channel to enable the British and French armies to halt the onrushing Germans under von Kluck.

Everyone, it is said, knew somebody who knew somebody who had seen long trainloads of Cossack soldiery, moving swiftly and nocturnally toward the Channel Ports.

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It got into the papers as a half-truth and was accepted by millions of British subjects who were starved for good news.

Of course it was utterly false—but by the time this was generally realized the Kaiser's drive to Paris had been stopped and there was no need for such a morale-boosting falsehood. It was simply dropped and forgotten.

We tended at first to regard the Flying Saucers as a sort of reverse-Cossack myth during the first year or so of their appearance. It was our hunch that a people faced with the dilemmas stemming from the atomic bomb, chilled by the ominous Cold War with Russia and infected by word of radar-to-the-Moon, was ready to accept the idea of interference from extra-terrestrial forces in terrestrial affairs.

Certainly the idea of such interference had its appealing elements. Under such extraneous pressure it was more than likely that the vast portions of our globe then and now in undeclared conflict would be forced to unite against a universal foe. Or, if the newcomers proved friendly, the opening up of inter-planetary relationships might abate the currently pressing points of difference.

There were others, of course, who thought the Flying Saucers were something dreamed up by the Russians, that they were surveying us for A or H-bombing with ultimate conquest in view. We took these with a large grain of salt too—for reasons shortly to be given. In general, we went along with the indignant denials that the Flying Saucers existed at all.

A Core of Truth

Now, after four years, we have altered our views. There are too many reputable reports of seeing them, too many unified descriptions of them, for any thinking person easily to deny their existence. Among all the hundreds of wacky stories and rumors there is a hard core of truth which mere words will not erase.

We do not believe the Saucers are extra-terrestrial in origin. Along with Fletcher Pratt, the famed military historian, observer and commentator, to say nothing of science fiction author, we cannot credit tales of two-foot-high green men, probably from Venus, which have been found here and there amidst Saucer wreckage and

(Continued on page 141)

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AS YOU WERE

A NOVELET BY HENRY KUTTNER

Peter Owen swings back to yesterday on a space-time pendulum in a frantic attempt to find a tomorrow worth living!

CHAPTER I

Blue Enamel Clock

SOMETHING was keeping Peter Owen awake. Either the coastal thunderstorm outside his bedroom window was distracting him, or his choice of reading material had been unwise. The book which Owen, propped up in bed, was reading, bore the revolting title of *New Uncoiled Gastropods From the Middle Devonian*, and had promised to be a relaxing change from last night's rather thrilling account of the Simpler Acyclic and Monocyclic Terpenes.

Peter Owen sighed and turned a page. Then he uncoiled nervously,

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like a gastropod, as a knock sounded on the door.

He called, "Come in," and looked up with some anxiety, relieved to see the short, plump, white-haired old gentleman who came stumping into the bedroom in response to his invitation.

"To myself, I say beer," announced the old gentleman, holding up a foaming glass. "Then I think, for a young man at bedtime—yes, Peter, you have guessed it. Beer."

With an air of triumph Dr. Sigmund Krafft allowed a smile to crease the imperturbable crumble of wrinkles he called a face. Owen, recalled from the life of the gastropod to the problems of his own somewhat more turbulent existence, took the beer with a vague blink. Then he remembered that Dr. Krafft was a guest in this house, though not his own. He prepared to get up.

"Why didn't you call me, Doctor?" he asked. "I'd have got you some beer. That's what I'm here for, after the servants leave for the night. Not that I mind. I mean—" He floundered slightly.

Krafft came to his rescue. "It was no trouble, Peter. I was thinking about next Tuesday. Next Tuesday night at this time I shall be in my own nice little study in Connecticut, all quiet and happy, and then I shall have a glass of beer. So I thought, Sigmund—yes, you have guessed it—I thought I would have a glass of beer now and imagine it was next Tuesday."

A crash, a thud and a loud outcry sounded from the floor below. The two men exchanged significant glances. Dr. Krafft shrugged a little. The outcry rose even louder and angry commands could be heard, muffled by the walls between and the noises of the storm outside. "Break, blast you!" the voice downstairs shouted. "Break!" Thuds followed rapidly.

"The Shostakovich records," Dr. Krafft said. "Unbreakable, you know. Perhaps a hacksaw—still, no. Better to keep away until he feels happier. I shall think about next Tuesday and forget all that trouble with your uncle, my boy.

Holding tightly to the clock, Peter lurched through time, catching vague glimpses of Claire's face

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I am sorry we disagreed, but how could I say a space-time continuum is not cyclical when I know it is?"

"Break! Break!" cried the voice from below, and a renewed thud made the walls shiver slightly. The full weight of the world-famous C. Edmund Stumm, author, critic and playwright, had apparently come down flat-footedly upon the offending records. "Break!" his voice shouted Tennysonianly, but no obedient crackle of vinylite responded and Owen curled up a little with dread. C. Edmund Stumm, thwarted, was not a subject to think about unmoved.

"That young lady, your friend—she is a brave girl," Dr. Krafft said soberly.

OWEN shuddered. Claire Bishop, fair and fascinating, was not so much brave as foolhardy. Also, she had a temper almost the equal of C. Edmund Stumm's. As a direct consequence, the indestructibility of vinylite was being tried to its last measure of resistance in the music room downstairs. Claire this afternoon, as a climax to a thoroughly disastrous interview with Uncle Edmund, had rashly expressed a preference for Shostakovich over Prokofieff. She thereby canceled completely all of Owen's desperate efforts of the past month to bring about an amicable meeting between the rising young screen actress whom he adored, and the uncle whose famous Broadway play, *Lady Pantagruel*, might well have been written with Claire's special talents in mind.

Due to the curious convolutions of Hollywood reasoning, the role of Lady Pantagruel was what Claire badly needed just now. Her career was in serious peril. But Owen's painstaking arrangements went for naught after the fireworks started. Uncle Edmund had so nearly—so nearly!—signed the contract of sale, Owen remembered in anguish. Still, how could he blame Claire? He stared at the floor and wished that he were dead.

"—lost my dear Maxl," Dr. Krafft was murmuring distractedly, peering about the room. "Now if you happened to notice where I might have put Maxl—"

"I beg your pardon, Doctor?" Owen said, recalling himself.

"I have lost poor Maxl," Krafft repeated, sighing deeply. "Ah well, who is perfect? The trouble with time-experimenting is that you cannot always remember when you did something. To find Maxl I need quiet and concentration. But without Maxl, how can I concentrate?" He smiled. "A paradox! For me, a scientist, to be helpless without a little stone frog—you have guessed it, Peter. Absurd! Ah, well!"

He turned toward the door, shaking his white head. "Good night, Peter. If you happen to see Maxl, you will tell me?"

"Right away," Owen promised. "Good night, Doctor. Thanks for the beer."

"Of course it is only a habit and a fetich, but—" The door closed on his mild murmuring. In the same instant a flash of violet light and an appalling crash from outside brought Owen upright with a start. Automatically, somehow, he attributed the noise to his uncle's ultimate success in smashing the records, perhaps with an atomic bomb. But vision instantly corrected that assumption.

Outside, near the edge of the cliff that jutted into the Pacific, a lone Monterey cypress stood outlined in a blaze of fire. As the lightning faded a new flash stood quivering in the sky, showing the cypress toppling headlong over the edge of the cliff.

Owen had an odd conviction that the cypress must somehow have offended his uncle. He sighed. Storms were no rarity at this season in the slightly famous little sea-coast resort of Las Ondas. Nor were storms rare in Owen's life, which explains why he had schooled himself in the past six months to imitate the passivity of a lightning-rod.

He rather wished he could uncoil, like a gastropod, from what had become a cramping position in life, ever since, at his uncle's insistence, he had quit his managerial job with a Hollywood commercial-film company and become Mr. Stumm's private secretary. The glibness of his uncle's promises had only stressed

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the fact that C. Edmund Stumm, himself, was one of the worst polecats in the state of California, which covers considerable territory.

Absently Owen fumbled for his beer. His eyes had gone back to the small print of his book, which dealt with what now seemed a lovely, unemotional, mild-tempered world in which the growth and reproduction of the slimy salamander plethodon glutinosus followed a calm, predictable course.

Have you ever picked up a glass of water, thinking it was milk or beer? Do you know that slow, incredulous moment of total disorientation as the surprise of it dawns upon your stunned taste-buds?

Owen took a long, satisfying drink of what he had every reason to expect was beer, chilled to exactly the right temperature by a special compartment in the refrigerator.

It was not beer.

But it was the most delicious, the most satisfying, the most incredible draught Owen had ever tasted in his life. Cool, shadowy, hollow, insubstantial as a breeze blowing from nowhere, the drink poured down Peter Owen's throat.

Shocked into belated surprise, he lowered the beer-glass, staring. But it wasn't a beer-glass.

He was holding a *clock!*

HE had never seen the clock before in his life. Sitting bolt upright against his pillows, conscious of the wild drumming of rain on glass, and muffled thunder far off over the sea, he swallowed convulsively two or three times. He could still taste that incredible draught. Or could he?

His throat seemed to tingle slightly, and he had an extraordinary sense of well-being, amounting almost to giddiness. This passed instantly, to be lost in baffled disbelief.

He glanced from the clock to the bedside table. There sat his glass, white-collared above the amber beer, its sides frosted with trickling condensation. Perfectly convinced that he was going mad, Peter Owen stared at the blue enamel clock, turning it over in his hands, looking for some conceivable explanation. His taste-buds still tingled.

Or did they? He reached hastily for the beer and took a swig. There was no comparison. This was good beer, but only beer—not nectar. Quite obviously, you can't take a drink out of a clock. From a skull, perhaps, if you have morbid tastes, or champagne from a slipper—but a clock? What could one drink out of a clock if a clock could be drunk out of?

"Time?" Owen wondered madly. "Time isn't a liquid. You can't drink time. I'm all keyed up. That's what it is. Imagination." He thought this over tentatively. "I was expecting to taste beer, so I *did* taste it—except that it didn't taste like beer. Well, that's natural. It wasn't beer. It wasn't anything. Just—a deep breath?" He puzzled over that, settling back slowly on his pillow. Then he sat up again abruptly, staring at the clock, as he realized suddenly that he had never seen it before.

He had a horrid suspicion that his uncle might have decided to give him an unexpected present. *Timeo Danaos,* he thought warily. Uncle Edmund never gave away anything. It might to the outward eye have seemed a gracious gesture to invite Dr. Krafft to Las Ondas for an extended seaside vacation, but the motives behind that were anything but gracious. Uncle Edmund was working on a sequel to *Lady Pantagruel* at the moment, and cunningly picking Dr. Krafft's brains in the process. *Lady Pantagruel's* popularity was in great measure due to the good Doctor's contributions at the time of its writing two years ago. It dealt with time-travel, somewhat in the manner of Berkeley Square, and many of the best ideas in it had been Dr. Krafft's, though one would look in vain for acknowledgements on the playbill.

As for the clock Owen still held in his shrinking hand, if it were a gift from Uncle Edmund it was probably a well-disguised atom bomb. He examined it warily. Some kind of booby-trap, without a doubt. Had the trap sprung? Cer-

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tainly *something* had happened, though surely he hadn't actually drunk a liquid draught out of the clock. A sort of mass hallucination of the senses might momentarily have deceived him, but not for long. The thing was impossible. . . .

It was a small clock, not much larger than an old-fashioned turnip watch—rather like an oppressed lemon, Owen thought with some natural confusion—and it had a loud, penetrating tick. It had the usual two hands, and apparently it wasn't an alarm clock. Also, it was thirteen minutes fast.

Owen blinked at his own clock on the bureau, an electric model with the alarm set for seven. Thoughtfully he reset the blue enamel clock, turning back the black minute-hand to ten-forty in agreement with the electric dial. Gingerly he put the loud-ticking object on the bedside table, gazed at it suspiciously, and reached for his beer. . . .

There was no beer.

Owen gave a faint cry of dismay and surged sidewise, staring down at the floor. He remembered very distinctly having set the glass on the table a few seconds ago. Had it fallen off? There was no trace anywhere of beer or glass. With a fearful suspicion that his mind had finally snapped under the strain of living with his uncle, Owen flung his torso headfirst out of the bed and dangled upside-down (like Mr. Quilp, he thought with a shudder), praying that the glass had rolled under the bed.

It hadn't.

"Delusions of persecution," he said to himself, upside-down, dizzily thinking how odd the words looked. "Now I'm suspecting Uncle Edmund of stealing my beer. Oh, this is terrible. I can never marry Claire now. I couldn't pass on the stigma of insanity to our children." The blood rushed to his head as he hung like a bat, peering under the bed and dimly hoping this might be a therapeutic measure to restore his sanity.

ACROSS the room and upside-down he saw the lower part of the door open, and a pair of gnarled feet in carpet slippers entered.

"Something is lost?" Dr. Krafft inquired mildly.

"Beer," Owen said to the feet. "I'm looking for a glass of beer."

"But in the wrong place," Dr. Krafft suggested. "To myself, just now I say beer. Then I think, for a young man at bedtime—yes, Peter, you have guessed it. Beer."

Owen wrenched himself back to a more normal position and sat up in bed, staring at Dr. Krafft with a disorienting feeling that he had lived through this moment before. The old gentleman was holding out a foaming glass.

"I shall drink one too," Dr. Krafft said placidly. "And I shall imagine it to be next Tuesday, when I am back home. Only—Peter, I am afraid I have lost my dear Maxl."

"Again?"

Dr. Krafft peered at him mildly. "Well, I am absent-minded, Peter. Of course it is absurd to have such a fetich-habit. But I cannot concentrate on my discontinuum orientation unless I look at Maxl, you see. And the tesseract experiments must stop until I find him. So much of the work depends on absolute concentration before plenum-consciousness can be obliterated. Long ago I used an opal. But I got used to little Maxl, and now I cannot work without him. If you see him, Peter, please let me know at once." Here he shook his white head gravely. "Ah well," he said. "Good night, Peter."

"G-good night," Owen said, and watched Dr. Krafft depart, leaving Owen to consider the possibility that he wasn't the only lunatic around here.

A flash of violet light and an appalling crash outside made him jerk around toward the window. Outlined in lightning, the lone Monterey cypress stood on the edge of the bluff. Apparently it had pulled itself together, crawled back up the cliff like a sprout from Dunsinane, and re-rooted itself just in time to disprove the truism that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. A second flash showed the dogged but doomed cypress again taking a nose-dive back over the brink.

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"No, no," Owen said in a low, mild voice of disapproval. Then he laughed quietly, but in what sounded to him like a slightly unhinged tone. "You're a glass of beer," he told the glass of beer. "And I'm a white rabbit with a blue enamel clock in my waistcoat pocket—no, what am I saying? Get a grip on yourself, Peter. You're asleep, that's all. Hang onto that thought. You can prove it. Put the glass down and watch it vanish."

CHAPTER II

Over and Over

IMPRESSED by the suggestion, he set the beer-glass down on the table and stared at it. Nothing happened. Lightning flashed. Owen glanced at the window. The cypress was still gone. On an impulse he looked under the bed again, half expecting to see the cypress. Nothing.

Straightening, he looked at the blue enamel clock. Its hands crept steadily on toward ten fifty-three, that erroneous hour from which he had corrected it. He was conscious of growing tension. At ten-fifty-three, he suspected, something might happpen. . . .

It didn't. Baffled, he picked up the clock and compared it with the electric dial on the bureau. Yes—no—something had or hadn't happened. He wasn't sure which. But the electric clock said ten-forty. Thirteen minutes had passed since his re-setting of the blue enamel anomaly, yet the electric clock still said ten-forty. Had the electricity failed? No. The lights had not even blinked.

Owen thought for some while. Then he shook his head, turned from impossible speculations, and with a feeling of relief devoted himself to the prosaic duty of re-setting the blue enamel clock correctly. Hallucinations were all very well, but the electric clock remained stable in a world of wildly veering events. On that he pinned his whole faith as he turned the black hands of the enamel clock back until they agreed with the electric clock's hands, which by now indicated ten forty-five.

At the same moment, with a sort of jolt in the middle of his brain, he realized that the electric clock had changed its mind and now said ten thirty-two. Moreover a familiar voice was remarking, "Ah, well. Good night, Peter."

Owen looked around sharply. Dr. Krafft, shaking his white head, walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

A flash of violet light made Owen turn toward the window as the door shut. He was just in time to see the indefatigable cypress on the edge of the cliff outlined in lightning before the persecuted tree fell over the brink again.

"Doctor!" screamed the terrified Peter Owen. "Dr. Krafft!"

He squeezed his eyes shut, dropped the blue enamel clock on the bed and fum-

[*Turn page*]

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bled blindly for his beer. Then he opened his eyes for fear he might blindly stick his hand into the open mouth of a goblin. When the beer-glass was safe in his grip he shut his eyes again, moaned softly, and took a drink. The door opened. There was an ambiguous rustling sound.

After a long pause, Owen said without opening his eyes, "If you're Dr. Krafft, come in quick. If you're a cypress, I can't help you. Go away. That lightning bolt will only track you down again and then we're both doomed. Think yourself lucky you're a tree. You can't go mad. *I* can."

"You could not get drunk that quick," Dr. Krafft said mildly. "Not on one beer!"

Owen opened his eyes, relieved at sight of the wrinkled face under the wild white hair. "One beer?" he said. "You've been bringing me beer all night."

He looked anxiously at Dr. Krafft's hands.

"Beer?" the Doctor said. "I?" He spread his empty hands.

"Well," Owen said weakly, "it seems that way."

"There is your beer," Dr. Krafft said. "Where I just set it down. Now I must go and find Max!"

"Doctor," Owen said hastily. "What time is it?"

Dr. Krafft looked at the electric clock, which now said ten thirty-five. The blue enamel clock looked up at them blankly from the wrinkled bed. It said ten forty-eight.

"Ten forty-eight exactly," Dr. Krafft said, referring to a wristwatch which had never been known to vary by a second. "Your electric clock is wrong. The power must have gone off today sometime. This storm." He shuffled to the bureau and reset the electric clock. Now it agreed with the blue enamel clock.

"Dr. Krafft," Owen asked desperately, turning the clock over in his hands, "I want to ask you something. Is it possible to travel in time?"

Krafft looked pensive. "We are all traveling in time, Peter," he said.

"Yes, I know, I know. But I mean really travel, into your own future or past. Has anyone ever actually done it?"

"How is one to tell?" Krafft asked, regarding him mildly. "It is proof I am seeking in my tesseract experiments. You know? I build a model of a tesseract—a cube exploded into four dimensions, symbolically—and then I try to free my mind from time-consciousness, so it can move freely through paratime. I concentrate all the energy of the mind upon the tesseract. What *should* happen is that the energy moving through time strikes the tesseract and collapses it into a normal cube. Inertia is inertia, and mass is mass, spatially or temporally. But it is hard to prove, Peter."

"What would be proof?" Owen demanded. "If somebody found a way to take quick trips into ten minutes ago, how could he prove it?"

THE aged savant shook his head and stared at Peter Owen doubtfully.

"Why would he want to do that, Peter?" Dr. Krafft asked reasonably. "To travel into the future—yes. One might achieve something. But you already know the past. Why relive it?"

"I don't know *why*," Owen said, shutting his eyes. "But I know *how*. This clock does it." He opened his eyes again and stared wildly at Dr. Krafft. "I'll set it back five minutes and show you!" he said. "No, wait. You do it. Turn it back five minutes and see what happens."

"Now, Peter," Dr. Krafft murmured.

"Here, try it!"

Blinking, Krafft accepted the clock and moved the minute hand back carefully. Nothing at all happened. Krafft waited. So did Owen.

Then Krafft returned the hand to its original point and gave Owen back the clock, regarding him inquiringly. Owen swallowed.

"But it happened," he said desperately. "Look, all I did was—this."

He turned the little knob on the back of the clock, watching the minute hand glide backward three minutes. . . .

"Good night, Peter," Dr. Krafft said, walking out of the room and closing the door behind him.

Owen snatched for the brimming glass

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of beer he knew would be on the bedside table. Not a single swallow had been taken from it. Gulping wildly, he gazed with horrified eyes at the window, quivering with sympathy for the miserable cypress even now clambering back up the cliff to keep its appointment in Samarra. The inevitable lightning flashed. . . .

But now he hadn't talked to Dr. Krafft about time-traveling at all. It hadn't happened! How could he prove the clock was a time-machine? Apparently it affected only himself. Not only could no one else use it, but Owen couldn't demonstrate without automatically erasing all Krafft's memories.

Desperately Owen drained the beer-glass, threw it away, snapped out the bed-light and emulated a coiled gastropod by burrowing under the covers and thinking of nothing at all. He didn't dare think. If he saw that wretched cypress take one more beating, he'd probably jump over the cliff after it. The whole thing was manifestly impossible, and in some inexplicable way he was drunk, dreaming, mad, or all three. He turned his mind off completely.

And after a long, long time, he fell asleep.

He had a curious dream.

It seemed he was a fish, lazing beneath a tropical sea. Far above him floated the shadow of a ship's hull, oddly reminiscent of a large wooden shoe. Long rods extended downward from the shadow, searching the sea-bottom slowly, like telescopes. Owen swam toward them. The water rushing through his gills reminded him of the strange, ineffable draught of time he had drunk from a blue enamel clock, when he was a man. That seemed a long time ago.

Adjusting his fins, he dived beneath the nearest rod and swam close, peering into what might have been a lens. He was gazing up directly into a large, intent, curious blue eye. . . .

He woke.

The blue eye was a square of clear blue sky outside the window. Owen lay looking at it, reluctant to take up the dark business of living. He was still dazed with his dream and he made feeble, flipping motions that should have sent him gliding smoothly out of bed. Presently he realized he was no longer a fish. He was Peter Owen, with fearful problems and a black future.

He sat up and began dreading the day before him. Life as Uncle Edmund's secretary had little to recommend it, now that all hope for acquiring *Lady Pantagruel* was dead. Uncle Edmund rejoiced in the worst possible relations with everybody he met. He even attempted now and then to quarrel with the placid Dr. Krafft, getting nowhere. With everyone else he could and did quarrel, and one of his secretary's more difficult jobs was smoothing down the enemy well enough to keep C. Edmund Stumm alive. Uncle Edmund was currently carrying on a deadly feud with Noel Coward, the Las Ondas Chief of Police and the local garbage collector. To all of these he gave his wholehearted attention.

This made life difficult for the middleman. But after today, Peter Owen would be middleman no longer. He might be dead—for to resign from Uncle Edmund's employ was to invite the lightning—but there are worse fates than death.

OWEN gazed miserably out the window. The cliff was reassuringly bare of cypresses, which made him feel a little better. "What a dream," he murmured. For it must have been a dream—two dreams, rather, one involving beer and cypresses and the other concerned with fish. There had also been a clock—or had there? He glanced at the bedside table. No clock.

"All a dream," he told himself. "Vivid, but a dream."

He was still telling himself this, not entirely with conviction, as he went downstairs to breakfast.

"You need not have been so prompt," Uncle Edmund said, looking up from his oatmeal with a vitriolic smile.

"Uncle Edmund," Owen said, taking a deep breath. "Uncle Edmund, shut up! I'm about to leave you."

He then held his breath and waited

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for the stroke that would disembowel him. . . .

And what was the trouble which had driven Peter Owen to this rash extremity? Claire Bishop was the trouble. You will all remember Claire Bishop in the film version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, with James Mason, Richard Widmark, Dan Duryea and Ethel Barrymore. In such distinguished company one would expect a newcomer like Claire to be quite overshadowed, but this did not happen. Everybody noticed and remembered her. She was that very pretty creature with the fluff of yellow curls and the ineffable switch to her walk, who drove up in the green convertible toward the end of Act Two. (You will recall that Hollywood took certain minor liberties with the original script.)

Claire's rise thereafter was meteoric, and so was her fall, due to a series of bad pictures ill-chosen, ill-cast and abominably written. In the depths, she met Peter Owen. Love burgeoned. And out of love, the rosy hope that with Peter's aid the impossible might be achieved and *Lady Pantagruel* purchased for Claire. In his spare time Peter Owen, fortified by love, moved mountains and rounded up a syndicate of backers who offered to put up the money for three pictures starring Claire if *Lady Pantagruel* could be wrested from C. Edmund Stumm's relentless grip as the first vehicle.

Could it? Peter had only to inquire. He inquired. C. Edmund Stumm, who loved nothing better than the whip-hand, would say neither yes nor no. He would and did say, however, that he needed a private secretary to do light work at a low salary. Perhaps, he hinted, if this private secretary caught him in a moment of weakness, he might even sign a contract relinquishing the film rights to *Lady Pantagruel*. . . .

Hence Owen's present degradation. The previous secretary had either gone mad or killed himself, he now knew. The line of demarcation between secretary and galley slave was regrettably faint, but Owen had bravely stuck it out, keeping Claire's fair face before his mind's eye and the possibility of a signed contract before Uncle Edmund's in all times and weathers.

Until yesterday, there seemed hope. But Claire—has it been mentioned?—had a temper too. Yesterday was one of those rare, halcyon days when C. Edmund Stumm mellowed by a series of lucky chances into near-humanity, went so far as to indicate that if Claire, her lawyer and the contract happened to convene in his library at a convenient moment, he might consider writing his name. . . .

The interview ended when Claire snatched a Prokofieff record off the phonograph and hurled it across the room, expressing a preference for Shostokavich, a distaste for C. Edmund Stumm's talents, and the intention of dying by inches before she would play Lady Pantagruel under any circumstances whatever.

She then stamped out of the house, leaving Peter Owen's heart shattered with the shattered record, and Uncle Edmund's temper fanned to hitherto unparalleled heights of fury. Hence the assault last night on the unbreakable Shostokavich records. Hence Peter Owen's despair this morning. Hence, indeed, his reckless defiance of the tornado across the breakfast table.

Having taken a short swing through times past, though without the aid of a blue enamel clock, we step through the dining-room door and sit down at the table with Peter Owen, facing C. Edmund Stumm and annihilation. Now—if you will—go on with the story.

* * * * *

"Uncle Edmund—shut up! I'm about to leave you."

Thus Peter Owen. Afterward he braced himself and wished he could shut his eyes. He didn't dare. It was better to watch Uncle Edmund closely in moments of crisis. And it was well he did.

Uncle Edmund was not a particularly rewarding sight. He looked like a wicked middle-aged cormorant, with sleek gray pinfeathers lying smoothly back along his head, and a pointed beak of a nose.

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His mouth was thin, small, precise and made for distilling vitriol.

He paused and looked up quite slowly as his private secretary's words echoed, perhaps with a slight quaver, upon the morning air. Uncle Edmund was pouring cream over his oatmeal. He held the cream-jug suspended over the bowl while he gazed at Owen with small, gimlet eyes that gradually suffused to a lively crimson as the full meaning of Owen's words gradually dawned on him.

"You are—*what?*" he demanded in a stifled voice, scraping his chair back slightly. *"What did you say?"*

"I said I'm about to—" Peter Owen began the words bravely enough, but he never finished them. Uncle Edmund hurled the cream-jug!

CHAPTER III

Robbery!

A LONG pale gout of cream smacked Owen neatly across the face. The jug crashed against the wall behind him and fell in fragments to the carpet. Dr. Krafft shook his white head mildly and sipped his coffee. Nothing could perturb Dr. Krafft.

Owen with a trembling hand mopped the cream from his face. What he might have done as soon as he could see again is a moot question. He thinks now he would have knocked Uncle's teeth in with a convenient plate. But he had no time. For Uncle Edmund's hearty laughter rang out above the buzz of rage in Owen's ears. Paper crackled.

"Look at this, you young nincompoop!" Uncle Edmund cried. "Wipe the cream off your stupid face and look at this!" And he laughed again, so merrily, so richly, that Peter Owen's heart sank like a plummet.

"This" was a contract. It was, in fact, Claire's contract for the purchase of *Lady Pantagruel*. Uncle Edmund was waving it like some succulent morsel under Owen's creamy nose.

"It may interest you to know, ingrate that you are," Uncle Edmund said in an acid voice, "that I got a letter this morning from Metro, definitely refusing to up their offer for *Lady Pantagruel*. Do you realize what that means? Oh no, of course not! How could you? It would take the I.Q. of a three-year-old to grasp it, so naturally—bah!" He thumped the table heavily, making the dishes dance. Dr. Krafft prudently picked his cup up just in time.

"I'll tell you what it means!" Uncle Edmund roared. "Miss Bishop's offer was the highest I've received. You know that. You saw to it. Snooping and prying among my private correspondence—" This was most unfair, Owen thought plaintively. "—reading my letters on the sly," Uncle Edmund stormed on, "you ferreted out what my best offer was. Then you saw that Miss Bishop topped it. Very well! A little decent family loyalty is all I ask. Loyalty to your own flesh and blood and the hand that feeds you. Too much to ask, you say? Yes, I suppose it is too much, from a toad like you. So!"

Again he smote the table. "It was on the tip of my tongue when you came bursting in here like a mad tiger to ask you to phone Miss Bishop. I had reconsidered. I need the money, as who knows better than you, you low spy? If Metro won't up the offer, then I have no recourse. I support you in luxury, and luxuries cost money. I'm a poor man. Beset on every side!" Here he glared at Dr. Krafft's mild, abstracted visage half eclipsed behind the coffee cup.

"Beset on every side!" he roared, maddened at the sight. "I was going to reconsider that termagant's offer. You hear me, Peter? If it hadn't been for your insults, I was going to grant your heart's desire!"

"Uncle Edmund—" Owen began. "Uncle Edmund, I—"

The sound of ripping paper interrupted him. Smiling fiercely, Uncle Edmund was tearing Claire's contract across. Laying the two halves together, he then tore them the other way. The quartered contract fluttered to his plate.

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Uncle Edmund picked up his half emptied coffee cup and poured its contents on the fragments.

"There!" he shouted. "There! Now you're sorry! Too late, my sneaking young friend, too late! Out you go! Now, this very second! Out of my sight! If you aren't packed and gone in fifteen seconds I'll have that nincompoop chief of police put you in irons. Go, go, go!"

And Owen went.

As he hastened from the room, he heard Dr. Krafft say placidly, "I had a most interesting dream last night. . . ."

* * * * *

He thought with anguish as he hurled shirts and socks into his suitcase,

"If *my* dream had only been real! If I could only turn the clock back far enough to get Claire's contract signed—"

At this moment a pair of socks coiled up like—you have guessed it—a gastropod, missed the suitcase and hurtled to the unmade bed. Owen saw them vanish down a blanket ravine, rummaged absent-mindedly, and felt his fingers close on something small, round, hard and cool. It ticked.

FACE to face, he and the blue enamel clock turned blank stares upon one another. "Dream?" murmured Owen distractedly. "Dream? Then I *am* a fish?" and he looked down anxiously for fins. He had none. That much was still unreal. But here in his hand, ticking gently away, was the clock that had made last night an endless repetition of itself—unless he'd dreamed the whole thing.

"A backspacer," Owen thought frantically, shaking the clock in a senseless way. "It backspaced in time. The moving finger writes—" Quite of their own volition, his own fingers reached for the knob on the clock that turned the minute-hand. "It can't happen," he assured himself, even as he turned the hand. "It was all a dream. I know that. I'm no fool. But all the same, if it *would*—"

The clock had said nine-five before he turned it. Carefully he twirled the black minute-hand until the dial said eight fifty-five.

"Can I lure it back to cancel half a line?" Owen asked himself madly. "That's the question. If I can—though of course I can't—then everything's dandy. I can unpack my suitcase and go right on downstairs to breakfast."

Then he looked at the bed and said to himself blankly, "*What* suitcase?"

For it was no longer there. Shirts and socks had flown back into their nests by magic. The suitcase even now reposed on the top shelf in the closet. And from downstairs came the gentle clatter of dishes and the voices of C. Edmund Stumm and Dr. Krafft in cheerful morning converse.

Peter Owen dropped the clock in his jacket pocket, closed a trembling hand firmly over it, and went downstairs to breakfast. . . .

"You need not have been so prompt, Peter," Uncle Edmund said with a vitriolic smile. "Sit down, sit down, since you're here. Still, it's bad enough having to eat oatmeal. When I have to look across the table at your porridge-face at the same time—" He shuddered ostentatiously and poured more cream from a miraculously renewed jug into his bowl.

"Good morning, Uncle," Peter Owen said in a firm voice. "Good morning, Doctor. Did you find Max!?"

Dr. Kraft shook his head sadly.

"Any mail, uncle?" Owen inquired with great cunning, forcing a smile.

"Don't smile at me, sir," Stumm said. "You merely increase the likeness to oatmeal by giving the impression it's been sugared. No, there was no mail that concerns you." Here he licked the cream off his thin lips and smiled as at a pleasant private jest.

"I have a job for you after breakfast," he added, fixing Owen with a gimlet glance. "That pudding-head Egan who calls himself police-chief left a ticket on my car last night. Go down and fix it."

Owen swallowed painfully. "But, Uncle, you know Egan won't—never mind, I'll pay the ticket."

"Out of your own pocket?" Stumm demanded sharply. "Suit yourself. *I*

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won't pay it. What good does it do me to be the first citizen of Las Ondas if the Gestapo harries me night and day? I've brought more tourist business into Las Ondas since I bought this house than they had in their whole history before I got here. If Fred Egan thinks he can harass me with parking tickets simply because I left my car beside a fireplug all night, he'd better think twice. Go down directly you finish breakfast and take care of it, Peter. Crime rolls unchecked through this town while Egan creeps through the underbrush waiting for me to make some petty misstep. I'm above the law in Las Ondas!"

He paused and drank coffee fiercely.

"Are you *sure* there wasn't any important mail?" Owen asked in a distracted voice. "I'd better go look. Maybe you missed something."

"Sit down, sir! Do you take me for a fool like you?"

"Ah," Dr. Krafft murmured placatingly. "Lovely morning, lovely morning Last night, gentlemen, I had a most interesting dream—"

"Hum!" Uncle Edmund said abruptly. "That reminds me. So did I. Most interesting." He regarded a piece of toast in his hand, sneered at it and hurled it into his mouth. Speaking around it, he went on. "This morning I am more inclined to give Dr. Krafft's theories special credence. I myself had an odd, yet thoroughly convincing dream. Prescient, perhaps. I had a bird's-eye view, as it were, of what Dr. Krafft might call the temporal plenum. It is spherical."

"Ah," Dr. Krafft said noncommittally.

"It is spherical," Stumm repeated in a firm voice. "Like the celestial sphere. I was surprised, in my dream, to see what I took to be a wooden shoe come sailing toward me. In this vessel I observed a party of time-travelers from the distant future who were visiting this day and age to see with their own eyes the man whose name must have gone ringing down the corridors of time to their own era—namely, me." He paused. "C. Edmund Stumm," he murmured, smiling to himself, like a man pouring cream over his own ego.

"Curious thing," he added presently. "Their anchor. Something odd about it."

"What?" Owen inquired in an urgent voice. "Did you see it?"

STUMM gave him an angry glance. "None of your business," he said. Then a look of yet deeper bliss stole across his features as he regarded his nephew. He touched his coat pocket with a loving hand. Paper crackled.

"By the way, Peter," he said suddenly. "I've had an offer from Metro for *Lady Pan[illegible]gruel*. They'll pay five thousand more than your termagant friend offered me yesterday. I just thought you'd be interested." He cleared his throat slightly. "In spite of Miss Bishop's vile temper and worse manners," he said, "I might just possibly reconsider my decision, *if* she can meet Metro's generous price. Think it over, my boy."

Owen looked at his uncle searchingly. In which *now* had he lied? Which tale was the true one? What ought he to do next? He was still debating the question when Dr. Krafft said in a gentle drone,

"My dream was much like yours, Edmund. Yes, you have guessed it. A schooner filled with time-travelers. Curious, eh? Essentially the same, though colored by our different personalities and interpretations. I dreamed that my tesseract-projection experiments were rising like bubbles to the surface of the paratemporal plenum, attracting the attention of our friends, the travelers. You know, the anchor intrigued me, too. Now that I think of it, the anchor seemed to be swinging to and fro, like a pendulum. Of course it could swing no farther than twelve hours."

Dr. Krafft paused, pondering. "Why of course?" he asked himself in a murmur. "Why did I say that? Part of the dream, no doubt. Time and space get confused so easily." Here he sighed. "Dear Maxl," he said. "With Maxl, I could work out the whys and wherefores. Without Maxl—" He shook his white head, a gentle scowl darkening his features. "In my last tesseract-projective session," he said, "I am almost certain

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I penetrated through to the next adjacent temporal dimension. A *most* interesting new chain of ideas hovered at the very verge of my mind. Oh, Maxl, where are you!"

"Forget about Maxl," Stumm said shortly. "You waste enough time on your experiments as it is. Remember, I have only three more weeks to get the rough draft of the new play finished. I'll want your close attention this morning, Sigmund. Yesterday you spent the whole day nose to nose with that idiotic stone frog. Today we have something more important to consider—Act Three."

"But the anchor!" Owen said plaintively. "I wish one of you could remember what it looked like. I wonder if—"

"The voice of the oatmeal," Uncle Edmund said unpleasantly.

"Maxl!" Dr. Krafft exclaimed in a sudden, high voice. He leaped to his feet, his aged face illuminated with joy. "Yes, I have guessed it! I remember where I left Maxl! In your library, Edmund! Excuse me, I must go to Maxl!"

In a rapid shuffle he hastened across the room toward the library door. The beam of his own delighted face seemed to precede him like the beam of a flashlight. Stumm watched with a certain sardonic expression on his cormorant features that Owen found rather baffling.

"Uncle Edmund," he said.

"Well?" This was an impatient snarl.

"I don't believe Miss Bishop's backers will raise their price again. But the sale could be closed at their top price if I could get her back today."

"Edmund!" Dr. Krafft's horrified cry from the library brought both men to their feet in alarm. "Edmund! Robbers! Thieves! Oh, my poor Maxl!"

CHAPTER IV

Time for Patience

THE library was indeed a dreadful sight. Glass from a broken french door glittered on the carpet. Rain had soaked the curtains and shapeless smears of mud led across the wet rug toward a shattered wall-cabinet. Once it had been glass-fronted. Once it had held a singularly uninteresting collection of gold coins, property of C. Edmund Stumm. It was empty now.

Stumm's breath hissed dramatically through his teeth. "My coins!" he said, and rushed across the room toward the looted cabinet.

"Maxl!" the Doctor cried again in a distrait voice, rushing after him. But he went only as far as the huge desk, where he bent to pat an empty corner of that vast bare surface tenderly. "There he sat, last night. Now I remember. Oh, my poor Maxl, stolen! Edmund, we must get Maxl back or I am a ruined man!"

"Nonsense," Stumm said, staring at the cabinet. "*My* coins are gone—thousands of dollars' worth." He was grossly exaggerating, though the collection did have some intrinsic worth and was heavily insured. "What would burglars want with a stone frog? Had he any real value, like my coins?"

"Only to me," Krafft told him sadly. "But I know he sat here last night. I remember clearly now. The burglars must have taken him, and I shall never think again."

"Peter," Stumm said coldly. "Hand me the phone."

"But Uncle Edmund," Owen said, glancing at the wall behind the desk, where a medium-sized safe exhibited a steel circle let into the panels, "hadn't you better check up on everything first? Maybe the burglars took more than the coins. Shall I open the safe?"

"I said hand me the phone," Stumm repeated even more coldly. "No shilly-shallying, young man. For every moment we delay the burglars may be drawing farther away, beyond the reach of the police. Let that safe alone! You'd like to learn the combination, wouldn't you, my clever young friend? It may disappoint you to know there's nothing of any value in it—only papers. Now will you hand me the telephone, or must I fling up the window and shout for the police myself?"

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Owen handed the instrument over in silence. There was a certain fierce satisfaction in Stumm's voice as he gave the mayor's number.

"Now we'll see," he muttered, waiting. "Now that great lummox of a Police Chief will—hello, hello! Is that you, James? C. Edmund Stumm speaking. My house has been robbed."

The telephone sputtered excitedly at this dramatic announcement.

"Chief Egan did it," Uncle Edmund said in a firm voice. "Oh, I'm not accusing him personally. I don't say he robbed me with his own butter-fingered hands. But crime has been running riot too long in Las Ondas, James, and this is the last straw. You know the trouble I've been having with that man. Egan has got to go!"

The telephone again sputtered.

"I don't care if he has six *dozen* children," Uncle Edmund snapped. As Mayor of Las Ondas your job's to protect the citizenry. This place is rapidly degenerating into a new Casbah. I refuse to let my name be connected with a dive as noisesome as the lowest quarters of Port Said."

Expostulation from the telephone.

"No," Stumm said finally, "Egan goes or I go, and that's final. I warn you, James, I'm seriously thinking of moving. Choose between us. Egan's persecuted me to the last ditch, and here I take my stand. Who sent a policeman to make trouble at four o'clock in the morning only last week, when I was giving a party? Egan. Who put a ticket on my windshield last night? Who tried to make me move along Sunday when I was parked in the middle of Main Street signing autographs? I tell you, James, it's Egan or me. Take your choice."

Firmly he banged the telephone down. When he met Owen's anxious gaze he was beaming with unwonted geniality.

"Mark this day in red," he commanded metaphorically. "My triumph over that oafish lumpkin is achieved at last." He glanced at the gently mourning Krafft. "Nor can I feel too grief-stricken at Maxl's departure. He took too much

[*Turn page*]

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!
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valuable time, far better devoted to me. I feel in fine fettle, Peter. It's a beautiful day, the lark's on the wing and I might even consider letting your Miss Bishop have my play, if she catches me in a good mood and controls her vicious temper. Are you sure those backers of hers have the actual cash ready to hand over?"

"Positive," Owen declared, almost carolling. "Shall I telephone her?"

"If you like," Uncle Edmund said graciously. "And if you think it worth while. When she crashed out of here yesterday I seem to recall a few ill-chosen remarks about preferring death to the role of *Lady Pantagruel*. Still, I feel kindly toward all the world today. Do as you think best. And Peter—make sure she brings a certified check."

CHIEF EGAN, a minor though in his way an important figure in the tale of Peter Owen, was large, pink-faced, kind-hearted and perhaps not *too* efficient. When Las Ondas was a wide place in the beach highway, he sufficed the town well enough. But his ways were still small-town ways. And he insisted quite irrationally on enforcing the laws of Las Ondas even on Las Ondas' most illustrious citizen.

Peter Owen met him at the door. Followed by three officers, almost the entire police force of Las Ondas, the chief came in awkwardly. Embarrassment seemed to strike him pink and helpless whenever he came within range of C. Edmund Stumm. He grinned anxiously at Owen.

"Hello, Pete," he said with a sigh of relief. "Thought Mr. Stumm might answer the door. What's the trouble?"

"Burglars," Owen said succinctly. "Come along, Chief—this way."

The library door was closed. Chief Egan turned the knob, found it recalcitrant, murmured, "Stuck, is it? Rain last night must have made the wood swell," and after an instant's tussle threw his mighty shoulder in a heave against the door, which shot wide open with the accompaniment of a sharp crack and a thud. A howl of rage followed instantly.

Through the open door the form of C. Edmund Stumm was revealed flat on his back, a notebook clutched in his hand and a frightful expression on his narrow face.

"Oh, golly," Owen said, hurrying past to lift his uncle from the carpet.

"Gosh," Egan gulped, turning very pink indeed. "I—uh—I'm sorry, Mr. Stumm. Were you coming out?"

"Yes," Stumm said after a long pause. He allowed Owen to help him to his feet in deep silence, while his face turned redder and redder with a sort of luxuriant fury. "Yes, Chief Egan," he said meticulously, brushing at his trousers, "I was coming out. I had hoped to avoid all possible irritations today and concentrate on my work. In order to shun the very sight of your incompetent jowls, I decided to get my notes and clear out before you lurched into my library." Here he shook the notebook wildly in midair. Words temporarily failed him.

The cormorant glare shifted to Owen.

"And as for *you*," he said ferociously, suddenly shifting his attack, "if that termagant Bishop woman so much as sets her toe inside my house today I'll have her arrested for breaking and entering. The very prospect of hearing her loathsome voice makes me froth at the ears. I shall close the deal with Metro this very morning. Shut up, sir! Give this brainless buffalo what information he pretends to need. It won't do the slightest good. As for Miss Bishop, we will not discuss the matter. A man can endure just so much. After being assaulted with a door and flung halfway across my study—why, the man's no better than a murderer! Out of my sight, both of you! And take your Gestapo with you. Quick, before I lose my temper!"

Hastily Owen drew the policeman into the library and closed the door. From the hall extension he could hear Uncle Edmund's voice acidly demanding Long Distance. Chief Egan, crimson-eared, lumbered forward to examine the looted cabinet, but Owen had little attention to spare. He was listening to Uncle Edmund rapidly putting his call through, getting his man and saying

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loudly, for the benefit of any eavesdropping ears,

"So it's a deal, Louis, *Lady Pantagruel* is yours. You can send your lawyer down this afternoon with the papers."

Peter Owen laughed wildly.

"That's what *you* think, C. Edmund Stumm," he said aloud.

The blue enamel clock was in his pocket. He took it out and turned the minute hand back. . . .

* * * * *

"Hello, Pete," Chief Egan said with an anxious glance past Owen into the hall. "Thought Mr. Stumm might answer the door. What's the trouble?"

"Burglars," Owen said, as before. "Come in. But *be careful.* Here, let me go first."

The library door was closed. Also, it had stuck slightly. Fending off the chief's clumsy offers to break it down, Owen knocked meticulously.

"Uncle Edmund," he called. "Chief Egan's here."

"Bring him in, bring him in," the voice of Uncle Edmund said testily.

"Stand back," Owen called. "The door's stuck."

Egan burst the recalcitrant door open. Stumm, clutching his notebook, glared at Egan and appeared to steam slightly.

"Morning, Mr. Stumm," Egan said, blushing. "Hear you had a little trouble last night."

"*I* had no trouble," Stumm observed acidly. "Nor do I expect to. That's what insurance companies are for."

"Those coins of yours, eh?" Egan said, his gaze searching the room. "That all that's missing? What about the safe?"

"I have just checked it, thank you," Stumm told him with lofty disdain. "Credit me with a modicum of good sense in handling my own affairs. The contents—papers valueless to anyone but me—are untouched. In my opinion the burglars were the veriest amateurs, since they made no discernible attempt on the safe. But even an amateur is perfectly safe in committing the vilest depredations under your nose, sir!"

So saying, he swung up his notebook and pointed accusingly at the chief, who stumbled backward, blundered into a corner of the desk and knocked a fluorescent lamp crashing to the floor.

Stumm's shriek of fury faded away into a long, diminishing wail as Owen snatched out his clock again and set the minute hand back. . . .

* * * * *

This time a full ten minutes elapsed before Egan trod heavily on Stumm's toe as they stood together examining the cabinet. The outraged playwright was screaming for arnica, X-rays and a bone specialist as Owen, sighing deeply, erased him.

But he did not set the clock back a mere five minutes. For he saw now that the odds against a peaceful outcome to this particular set-up were hopeless. Stumm and Egan simply could not occupy the same house for longer than a few minutes without flying into conflict. It just wasn't worth the effort of trying to anticipate trouble before it burst out between them.

Nor could Egan be sidetracked, so long as there was a burglary to solve. The answer seemed obvious. Sometime during the night's storm, burglars had broken in the french door, looted Uncle Edmund's coin collection and presumably made off with Maxl at the same time. All Owen had to do to make everyone concerned happy—except, of course, the thieves—was to slip backward in time, discover the hour of the crime, and thwart it. Wishing he had thought of this sooner, he reached for the knob of the clock. At the moment it declared a rather tentative ten o'clock in the morning. Recklessly Owen twirled the hands backward. . . .

Jolt.

The knob would turn no more. Owen paused, chiefly because he could no longer see the face of the clock. It was not ten of a sunny morning any more. It was somewhere in the dark of a stormy night. He stood in total darkness, listening to the drum of rain and the distant sounds of Prokofieff's *Scythian Suite* from the music-room. A gust of

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wet, chill air blew in his face out of the darkness. Fearing the worst, he groped across the library to the fluorescent desk-lamp, and in the rather ghastly blue daylight of its illumination saw that he had come too late.

Under cover of the storm, the burglars had come and gone. The windows lay shattered on the carpet, mud splotched the wet floor and the glass-fronted cabinet was broken and empty. No Maxl squatted on the desk. Clearly the burglars had swiped dear little Maxl along with the coins.

The blue clock in his hand assured Owen with a bland-faced stare that it was ten in the evening. He shook it slightly and tried the knob again, wondering why it had stuck. He could move the minute hand back, but no more than about fifteen seconds. The only result was to plunge the library into darkness again and backspace the *Scythian Suite* a dozen bars.

Patiently Owen turned on the fluorescent once more and considered the clock. "So you won't turn back past ten," he said thoughtfully. "Why?"

THEN something Dr. Krafft had remarked during one of this morning's breakfasts returned to him from infinitely far away. "The anchor," Dr. Krafft had said, "seemed to be swinging to and fro, like a pendulum. Of course it could swing no farther than twelve hours."

"Anchor?" Owen demanded, shaking the clock again. "Are *you* an anchor? A pendulum? And twelve hours is your limit, I suppose."

The cold breeze from the window made him shiver. He glanced around the looted library uncertainly. He couldn't prevent the burglary unless he went farther back in time than the clock seemed willing or able to take him. Besides, if he were found here he wouldn't put it past Uncle Edmund to have him arrested for burglary.

He twitched at the clock-hands tentatively. Until now he had had no chance for experimentation. If he turned it forward, would he leap ahead through time, back to tomorrow morning—using the clock's tabular key, as it were, instead of the backspacer?

No. He turned the hand ahead, without result. The rain still blew through the broken window. Prokofieff never altered a beat. Even without the thunderstorm the burglars could have broken the window unheard, Owen thought, and morosely left the rifled library.

Rather hopelessly he went upstairs to his own bedroom, curious to see what he would find. The bed was freshly made. On the table beside it stood nothing, not even a glass of beer. Naturally enough, since Dr. Krafft hadn't brought him any beer until nearly ten-forty last night—*last* night? Or now?

"That," Owen told himself, "is a problem for Dunne. If you need a Time Two to measure Time One in, you'd need a whole new language for what I'm doing now."

Lightning flashed, and outside appeared the recrudescent cypress, valiantly in place again on the edge of the cliff.

"Cypress redivivus," Owen said with a moan. "Oh, no, not again!"

He glanced up at the black sky above it, as though half expecting to see the hull of a funny-looking schooner hovering in mid-air, and thought worriedly that three people can't dream the same dream by coincidence. And it *was* the same dream.

CHAPTER V

And Patience With Time

PETER looked around the room in discouragement. What next? Backward he could not go, obviously. Forward again seemed the only way, and that apparently had to happen in the usual, minute-by-minute process of ordinary living. So he had tonight to live through, dream and all (would it be the same, supposing he slept?), and afterward breakfast, Egan's arrival, and uncle's vindictive call to Metro and the

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ultimate loss of *Lady Pantagruel.*

Must it happen exactly as before, or could the past be changed? Of course it could be changed. He'd changed it. Originally he hadn't gone into the library at ten o'clock. But in its essentials, was it alterable? He hadn't done very well in trying to stop a clash between Uncle Edmund and Egan.

Lightning flared, and the doomed cypress tossed its branches wildly at the cliff-edge. In ten minutes—he glanced at the clock—the wretched tree would get it again. In about eight minutes Dr. Krafft would enter with the beer and the query for Maxl.

Krafft was the man. *He* could explain all this if anyone could. He might even help to work out a solution, except that —Owen sighed—he wouldn't believe the tale. Last night—this night—Owen had tried to show proof enough to engage the scientist's attention, and it couldn't be done. Not without automatically wiping out all the necessary memories from Krafft's mind.

"A lot of good *you* are," he said to the clock, shaking it again and remembering the Mad Hatter in the same moment. For an instant he had a perfectly horrible feeling that this clock in his hand was the identical clock which the Mad Hatter had taken from his pocket and consulted, with many shakings, to learn what day of the month it was. " 'If you'd only kept on good terms with Time,' " the Mad Hatter said, and he must have been an authority on the subject, " 'he'll do almost anything you like with the clock.' " It had been butter—the *best* butter—that stopped that particular clock. A lubricant.

"Is that what happened to me?" Owen inquired of the empty air. "When I—drank—out of the thing? A sort of lubricant, that makes me frictionless in time? But *where did it come from?* What *is* the clock?"

Then he thought of the three dreams about the schooner shaped like a wooden shoe, and the fishermen probing the depths of time while they swung at anchor upon—what? This clock? Something clock-shaped to look like a normal thing here at the sea-bottom, but not a clock at all. . . . Mustn't frighten the fish.

"This," Owen thought in sudden panic, "could be dangerous. I've got to talk to Dr. Krafft!"

* * * * *

"To myself, I say beer," the elderly savant declared, holding up a foaming glass. He paused in the doorway, beaming placidly. "Then I think, for a young man at bedtime—what is this, Peter? Still up?"

"Dr. Krafft, I've got to talk to you!" Owen took the glass from his hand and pulled a chair forward. "Please sit down. Listen, Doctor. It's about time travel. I mean, something's happened. That is, I've got to prove to you that there is such a thing as time travel."

"You have got to prove to *me* that there is such a thing as time travel?" the astounded old gentleman said, slightly stunned. "Why in the world do you suppose I have devoted the major part of my life to experimenting on this subject? No, Peter, it is good of you, but you do not have to prove it to me. You have guessed it, my boy—I am convinced already."

"You don't understand," Owen said wildly. "Look—it's exactly ten thirty-eight now, isn't it?"

"Yes, so it is. Why do you carry that clock around?"

"Never mind. You know that cypress out on the point, beyond the terrace? Well, in exactly three minutes that tree's going to be struck by lightning and fall over the cliff."

"Ah, I see," Dr. Krafft murmured with surprising calm. "In three minutes?"

"You aren't surprised?"

"After my years of experience with prescient dreams?" Krafft inquired infuriatingly. "No, I am not surprised. You dreamed the tree would be struck, eh? So. I will make a note of it."

"I didn't dream it!" Owen cried. "It happened. I saw it happen. Over and over I saw it."

"A recurrent dream? That is usually

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the most interesting of all."

"Every tonight at ten-forty the cypress gets hit by lightning," Owen said in a low, despairing voice. "Nobody cares. Nobody but me."

"Of course I care, Peter," Dr. Krafft said encouragingly. "See, I have made a note of it. At ten-forty we will watch. I will give you a footnote in my next book, perhaps. But one thing at a time."

"One thing at a time," Owen murmured, and laughed a hollow laugh.

"Eh? First, Maxl—my little Maxl. Yes. I have lost Maxl."

"Maxl has been kidnaped," Peter said swiftly. "Never mind. Maybe I can find him for you. Maybe I can stop the kidnapers before they ever happened, if you'll only listen. Please sit down. Now. Dr. Krafft—" Owen made his voice impressive. "I've lived through this night once already. More than once. I lived straight through to ten o'clock tomorrow. Then I jumped back to ten tonight. Now I'm on the escalator of normal time being carried forward, and I can't move the clock's hands back past ten." He looked despairingly at Krafft. "If you can't help me," he said in a piteous voice, "I'm ruined."

OF all this, however, Krafft heard only the name of Maxl. Normally he was a kind old man, much concerned with the troubles of his friends, but we all have our personal phobias, and we know Dr. Krafft's.

"Maxl, kidnaped?" he demanded, springing from his chair. "When? How? Tell me at once, Peter!"

"Burglars broke into the library and looted Uncle Edmund's safe," Owen said somewhat tiredly. "Maxl was sitting on the desk. At least, you seemed pretty sure he was. They took him. Why, nobody will ever know unless I can turn the clock back past ten o'clock."

"You have guessed it!" Dr. Krafft cried in an excited voice. "Now I remember! I *did* leave Maxl on Edmund's desk this morning. He was scolding me because I could not think of some foolish dialogue for his foolish new play, and I was trying to collapse a tesseract-form into a cube through a new time-dimension in my own mind. So naturally, I was thinking of Maxl—yes, yes! Thank you, Peter! I must hurry right down."

"Don't," Owen urged him. "I just came from the library. Maxl's gone. So are uncle's gold coins. The burglars had got there before ten, you see."

"Gone! And you said nothing? But Peter, Peter, we must act! We must call the police, before the burglars who took Maxl get too far away!"

"Wait, Dr. Krafft. Please listen a minute. I tell you, I've lived through all this before and I know! The best way to get Maxl back is to prevent his being stolen at all. If you'll only listen to me, maybe we can figure out a way to turn the clock back past ten, and everything will be perfect."

"Peter, Peter," Dr. Krafft murmured sadly. "I fear I was carrying coals to Newcastle when I brought you a drink tonight. Go to bed, my friend, and sleep. Tomorrow when your head is clearer we will talk. Just now, I must go!"

Lightning outside the window made the black panes burn violet for an instant. There was an ominous crack of cypress limbs accepting the stroke of destiny once more. Then the second flash, exactly on schedule, revealed the tree toppling with a resigned, fatalistic lurch over the cliff.

"Ah?" Dr. Krafft said on a rising inflection, glancing at the clock. He took his notebook from his dressing-gown pocket and scribbled briefly. "Ten-forty exactly. Most interesting, Peter. Most interesting! Your dream was quite accurate. Of course we must allow for the laws of coincidence."

"Dr. Krafft, do you remember your dream last night?" Owen demanded. "About the time-travelers and the ship?"

Krafft blinked inquiringly. "Last night? No."

Owen clutched his head. "No, no, no! I'm sorry! My mistake. You haven't dreamed it yet. That's for tonight and it hasn't happened yet. Angels and ministers of grace, defend us, isn't there *any* way to convince you?"

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"Peter," Dr. Krafft said with mild solemnity. "Sit down. There on the bed. That's right. Pile the pillows up. Be comfortable, my boy. Now, you see? I sit down here. I too am comfortable. Poor Maxl will wait. We must get to the bottom of this. Tell me, please, what is on your mind."

Owen told him.

"May I see the clock?" Krafft asked when the story came to its end. Silently Owen handed it over. Krafft examined it carefully, scratched without effect at the blue enamel, shook it, listened to it, compared its dial with the electric clock. Then he pinched the knob on its back and twirled the hands easily and smoothly back past ten, past nine, past eight. He looked up.

"You see?" he murmured to Owen. "You see?"

"Of course I see," Owen said with deliberate patience. "Anyone can do it but me. I proved that to you once before, tonight. *I* can't do it, though."

"Try," Krafft urged, holding out the clock.

"Oh no! I don't want to wipe out everything that's happened tonight up to ten. Look, Doctor. Call it hypothetical if you have to. But given that premise, won't you *please* try to work out an explanation for me? Hypothetically!"

"Hypothetically," Krafft murmured with an infuriating mildness, "you have indeed a most interesting paradox. I must confess it all holds together very convincingly—if one accepts the single impossible premise of the clock. I should like to write it all down, later, as a nice problem in temporal logic. But later, later, when I find Maxl again. Now, I cannot really concentrate."

"Try!" Owen urged him. He held out an empty hand, palm up. "Imagine Maxl's sitting on my hand. Look at him. Think!"

DR. KRAFFT'S faded blue eyes gazed interestedly at empty space, becoming slightly crossed as he focused on an intangible Maxl.

"*If* there were a schooner full of time travelers," Owen prompted him desperately. "If they dropped anchor—hypothetically, symbolically, not literally—and the anchor *looked* like this clock, and my story were a problem you had to solve, what would occur to you?"

"I would say first," Dr. Krafft murmured, still gazing fixedly at the unseeable Maxl, "that the clock has no seams anywhere. Have you observed that? The average clock has many cracks left after assembly, so that one can tell how it was made. This is all one piece. A new method, no doubt. Some way of casting that leaves no joints or seams. However, hypothetically, let us consider.

"Now, clocks are most interesting relics, in a way, of the ancient Chaldean, Egyptian, and kindred mathematical systems. So are compasses. These two things represent almost the only vestigial remnants in our own society of the old sexagesimal mathematics, founded on sixty instead of ten, like our decimal method. So that actually, both space and time are still measured in the ancient way. So it strikes me that for travelers in time to cast out a space-anchor in the likeness of a clock would seem not entirely nonsensical. Eh, Maxl?"

The white head shook impatiently. "No, no, it *is* nonsense. And there is no Maxl."

"Go on, Doctor," Owen urged. "You're doing fine. If the clock were a temporal anchor, then what? That draught I drank—or thought I drank—does it suggest anything to you? A sort of temporal lubricant, like the best butter?"

"When I have Maxl," Krafft said, "and I concentrate closely with his help, I sometimes succeed in letting my consciousness slip free from this continuum of space-time, as if—as if there were a certain reorientation in a direction that has no equivalent in space. As if I were frictionless, if you like, in time. Now if one accepts as a hypothesis that you did somehow absorb from the clock a draught of some lubricant—it does not make much practical sense, of course—one result might be that you, and only you, are so geared to the clock that you are pulled backward in time by it when you reset the hands."

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"As if the anchor were dragging?" Owen suggested with interest. "Maybe the schooner's drifting backward in time too, and whenever I reset the hands, the anchor slips and drags into the past. I wonder if they're noticing it?"

Krafft chuckled. "Mixing a temporal lubricant would not be easy, my boy."

"No, of course not. But you know the fluid clutch? You mix up millions of tiny iron-particles with oil, and when you magnetize the iron the oil freezes solid until it's released again. What if I drank something like that?"

"Then you would remain fixed solid in normal time until you turned the clock back, releasing yourself from time, allowing the anchor to drag you back. Yes. I can visualize that. Do not, however, confuse time with space, except to remember that duration is as vast as space, perhaps vaster. Whatever keeps us embedded in our normal time-plenum, we should be grateful to it. To be frictionless in time might be very dangerous. Only inertia would keep one from slipping off into past or future or cross-time parallels. Most awkward! The slightest push from anything else that happened to be moving through time with you might send you hurtling away."

"But what could?"

"Well, your schooner might, if you collided with it. Or another time-traveler, which isn't likely. You must consider the sea upon which that schooner might float as a—a sort of paratime as distinct from the serial times which we live in and perceive in prescient dreams and in memories. When you are frictionless in time, as you are while the clock turns back, and of course I speak hypothetically, my boy—then you are at the mercy of any casual traveler through paratime who may collide with you and send you sailing off helpless, unable to get any traction to stop yourself. I advise you to look out for time-travelers."

"Like a rocket-ship in space," Owen murmured. "That's not important, though. Look here, Doctor—*why* can't I get back beyond ten o'clock? If twelve hours is its limit, and I suppose it has to be with this sort of numbering on the dial, why can't I turn it now to twelve hours ago as of right this minute?"

"Because you aren't existing now, obviously, my boy," Krafft assured him. "Hypothetically, hypothetically, of course. You have not really cheated time. You follow your normal progression through paratime, as the planets follow theirs through space, though still revolving in their orbits and on their axes. I would assume, from the data at hand, that you obey immutable laws by existing legally, as it were, in tomorrow morning at the hour of ten, when you turned back the clock. It returned you—hypothetically—to ten tonight."

HE nodded at the blue clock Owen held.

"If we remain inside our hypothesis, Peter, we might draw all sorts of wondrous inferences from the way that clock is sealed. Arbitrarily we consider a clock a collection of cogs geared to measure time. Inside that clock we might, if we were to open it, find something very different indeed. The space-time plenum, my boy, is basically a matter of frequency, which reminds one irresistibly of the atomic clock, with its monitoring oscilloscope. *That* operates on quantum transition, as you no doubt know. The symmetric output pulse is produced by the absorption-line frequency of ammonia gas absorbing control signals, so the clock has a potential accuracy of something like one part in ten billion. It tells time, Peter, by the movements of atoms themselves. Frequency, you see! It all fits very neatly together—in hypothesis. A clock is precisely what your time-travelers might well toss overboard for an anchor, a device which could be set to a particular space-time frequency so they would not slip off for lack of friction while they study."

"You dreamed," Owen informed him, "that they were studying the bubbles your tesseract-experiments sent up to the surface of the sea."

"No doubt, no doubt," Krafft murmured.

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"But Doctor, you did! Wait. Tonight you'll dream it."

Krafft laughed gently. "I should not be surprised if I did, Peter, after this very interesting talk. But you and not I would be its originator!"

"*They're* the originators," Owen said stubbornly, glancing up as if toward the hull of the hovering ship. "From the future, I wonder?"

"Perhaps natives of paratime itself," Krafft suggested in an indulgent voice. "Perhaps they exist only in absolute time, like deep-sea creatures. One might imagine that the pressure of normal time could crush them, as deep-sea pressure would crush a man. Except that the compacting would have to occur through time—they would be squeezed into an instantaneous existence, like mayflies." He chuckled. "Perhaps that is what mayflies are, Peter—compressed time-travelers, their whole lifetimes crushed together into a day!"

"If *my* whole lifetime isn't going to be crushed," Owen said, "I've got to get back past ten o'clock and stop that burglary. I've got to do it, Doctor!"

"My boy, you cannot," Krafft said flatly. "Even if your little blue clock were the anchor and the time-vehicle you suggest. If I were you, I would try to make use of it in some better way, such as preventing Edmund from discovering what you cannot prevent from happening. That is my solution to your very interesting hypothetical problem." He got up stiffly. "And now, my boy, *I* shall go down and get Maxl."

"Maxl's gone."

"Ah! Well, we shall see. Tomorrow we may find the burglary too a part of your very interesting dream."

"But the cypress!" Owen said excitedly. "It's the only bit of proof I had left, but it at least paid off. You saw it!"

"Peter, my boy, I did see it. I congratulate you on experiencing a most interesting prescient dream. But no more than that. You are tired, my boy. You are over-excited. So I suggest—yes, yes, you have guessed it, Peter. You had better drink your beer and go to bed."

"I'm tired of going to bed!" Owen said in a desperate voice. "Besides, I might wake up yesterday. The time-travelers might catch me. Maybe they're just fishing for a shore dinner."

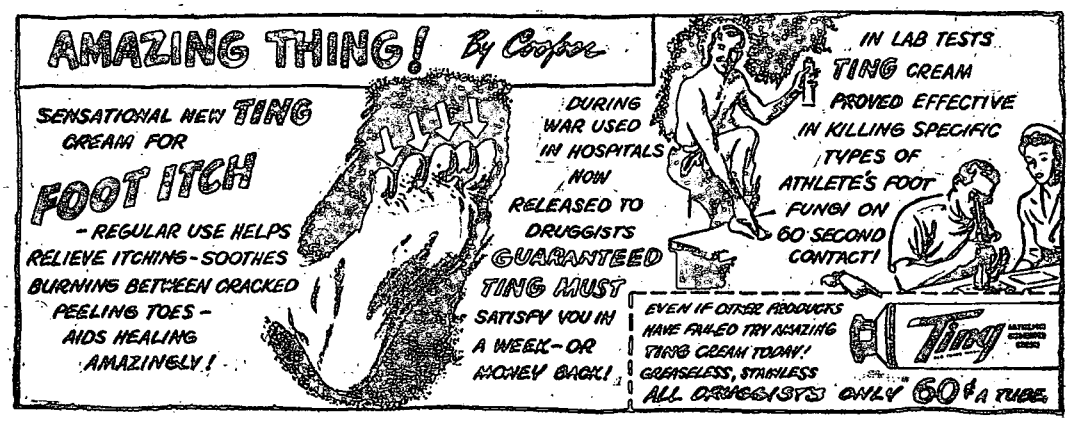
"Drink your beer," Krafft said in his imperturbable voice. "I thank you for telling me where to find Maxl."

"If he isn't there," Owen said, clutching at straws, "will you believe me? If you find burglars actually did break in, will you believe?"

"But Peter, you speak of an accomplished fact. If it happened at all, it happened before ten tonight. Quite so. Then where does time-travel enter? If you say you were down there and saw the broken window, I will believe you. But you needed no magic clock for that. You should have notified your uncle, not sat down with me to spin eccentric tales. No, no, you are over-excited, Peter. I must go now. Indeed, I must go."

He turned toward the door.

[*Turn page*]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Owen sighed and picked up the clock. He didn't want to do this, but he had no choice. The good Doctor would find the looted safe, summon Uncle Edmund and the police, and Uncle Edmund's rage would know no bounds.

"Good night, Doctor Krafft," Owen said calmly, and turned back the hands of the clock.

CHAPTER VI

Sponge Out the Past

LATER Peter went to bed. Eventually he slept, his head seething with useless plans and thoughts so complex as to defy description. He had a distracting dream.

A flying saucer was drifting on the surface of an odd-looking ocean where the waves looked unaccountably like minutes, though how he recognized the likeness he didn't know. Aboard the saucer were three time-travelers named Wynken, Blinken and Nod, and they were all sea-sick.

At intervals they staggered to the anchor-chain and tried feebly to pull it up. The chain kept swaying and twitching wildly.

Aside from the obvious fact that the three kept coiling and uncoiling like gastropods, the time-travelers were utterly indescribable.

* * * * *

The next morning—so to speak—Owen woke with a much clearer head, but a sense of doom hanging over him which made him feel like a cypress. It was very early. The thin, gray air of a seaside morning, salt-smelling with a hint of lemon-flavored sage from the hills inland, filled the room with complex odors.

Owen sat up in bed and thought.

"Doom?" he asked himself inquiringly. "Why?"

And the answer came to him. Those time-travelers, at the anchor-chain, hauling up the anchor. He snatched swiftly for the blue clock, and as swiftly let it go, fearful of being whisked through the ceiling into paratime in the wink of an eye.

"It isn't really true, of course," he assured himself. "They aren't actually seasick. We all colored those dreams we had about them by our own personal warps. I must be worrying about the anchor-slip that happens whenever I jump back in time. But can I be *sure* they aren't pulling up the anchor? This clock isn't a gift. Probably a loan at best, and they may take it back any minute."

That was the sense of impending doom. He could lose the clock at any time. And he had come to depend on it. No human agency could possibly unravel the awful skein of his dealings with *Lady Pantagruel*, Uncle Edmund, Chief Egan and Claire. Even with the clock he wasn't sure how he could accomplish anything.

"Oh!" Peter Owen said suddenly, and sat up even straighter.

Of course he could accomplish something. He could accomplish everything, if he worked fast and kept his wits about him. And he'd have to work fast. Wynken, Blinken and Nod might decide to up-anchor and go home before he got his plan under way.

Dr. Krafft had given him the clue, after all. Past ten last night he could not go, but the purpose was to thwart the burglars, and if Uncle Edmund didn't discover the burglary until the sale of *Lady Pantagruel* could be arranged to Owen's satisfaction, then the same end would be accomplished.

Owen blinked excitedly at the gray air of early morning. Presently he would go down to breakfast. Presently Uncle Edmund—unless time had changed more than seemed likely—would insinuate that Claire's offer for *Lady Pantagruel* might be acceptable. Then was the time to strike, while Uncle Edmund's mood stayed comparatively plastic.

Somehow Owen would have to keep the robbery secret. Somehow he would have to muzzle Doctor Krafft whenever he seemed about to remember Maxl in

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the library. Chief Egan had to stay out of the house and Claire had to come in!

In robe and slippers, moving silently through the silent house, Owen hurried downstairs to the hall telephone. He had a nervous feeling that he might pass himself somewhere in paratime, and a definite neurosis about the chances of finding Peter Owen in bed and asleep when he went back to his room. But he managed to get a call put through to Claire Bishop's apartment in Los Angeles without any major slip-ups.

The phone rang a long time.

"Hello," Claire's cross and sleepy voice said, at the end of several interminable minutes. "Hello—*Peter?* What on earth do you mean, waking me up at dawn?"

Hastily Owen spoke. "Now darling, pull yourself together. I couldn't stand another scene, after yesterday. Take a deep breath and keep your temper. Okay?"

HESITATING between anger and fondness, Claire laughed uncertainly.

"I want you to get dressed right away and wake up your lawyer and come down to Las Ondas," Owen went on rapidly.

"Peter, you're mad!"

"Don't argue, darling. You'll never know what I've been through since yesterday. I can get *Lady Pantagruel* for you if you do exactly as I tell you."

"I hate *Lady Pantagruel!*" Claire declared passionately. Owen could picture, as via television, her fluff of yellow curls standing on end and the sudden blaze in her round blue eyes. "I'll see your disgusting Uncle Edmund dead in his coffin before I appear in that play."

This went on for some while. But not forever. Eventually she said:

"Well, darling, if it weren't for you I'd never do it. You've got a sweeter nature than I have, Peter dear. What is it you want me to do?"

"Get down here as fast as you can. Uncle Edmund breakfasts at nine. I'm going to manage things so that by nine-thirty he'll be prepared to sign the contract of sale. Then I want to reach you in a hurry and get you and your lawyer over here without a minute's delay. If you stop for breakfast at—say—the Las Ondas Hotel, I can phone you when I need you."

"All right, darling. I'll do it."

"And *keep your temper!*"

"I'll try, Peter." A pause. Then, "Peter dear!"

"Yes, darling?"

"I have a bit of good news for you, dear. Guess what? A job for you managing the Claire Bishop Film Company —*if* we get *Lady Pantagruel.*"

Owen exhaled deeply into the telephone. "How did you work that?"

"Oh, I've been at it quite a while. Your experience with the commercial film company got you a good name in certain circles, and I've been building you up tremendously. Yesterday afternoon I wrung a definite promise out of our most important backer, and all we need to do is sign up Uncle Edmund. Okay, Peter dear?"

"Ah," Owen said, and there was a brief period of verbal smooching.

* * * * *

"You need not have been so prompt, Peter," Uncle Edmund said with a smile of acid, looking up from his plate. "Sit down, sit down. Bad enough to eat oatmeal, without looking at a face like porridge while I do it." He shuddered ostentatiously.

"Good morning, uncle. Good morning, Doctor Krafft. Was there any interesting mail?"

"Yes, there was," Uncle Edmund said. "I got an offer from Metro for *Lady Pantagruel,* topping Miss Bishop's by ten thousand. Naturally, I intend to—" Here he moved his hand suddenly, caught his cuff in the cream-jug and overturned its contents neatly into his lap.

His roar of rage made the windows rattle.

"Naturally, I intend to sell the play to Metro the moment Louis gets down to his desk!" he shouted, and leaped up, mopping furiously. "Peter, it's your job

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to see that my belongings are set out where I don't fall over them. I have a good notion to throw this in your face!"

Owen placidly slipped his hand in his pocket and turned back the clock. . . .

"—got an offer from Metro for *Lady Pantagruel,*" Uncle Edmund was saying serenely enough, spooning up oatmeal.

Owen leaned across the table and moved the cream-jug carefully. Uncle Edmund pierced him with an annoyed look, but before he could speak Dr. Krafft, following some private thought-train, spoke gently.

"You know," he said, staring pensively at his thumb-nail, "I have almost remembered something. Wait. Please." He squeezed his eyes shut. "I think I know where I left my dear little Max!"

"On the beach!" Owen exploded, with such violence that Uncle Edmund jumped and nearly upset his otmeal. Dr. Krafft opened his eyes, blinked, and shook his head.

"No, Peter, you have not guessed it. It was—wait, I almost have—"

"You took a walk on the beach yesterday morning," Owen said. "You had some thinking to do. And you took Maxl along, remember?"

"Ah, but I brought him back again," Dr. Krafft murmured. "No, I left Maxl on the—I left him—"

"On the beach," Owen said firmly. "You didn't bring him back. I remember noticing. I thought you must have put him in your pocket. But you couldn't have. You were just wearing swimming trunks. That's logical, isn't it?"

"What?" the confused savant asked. "Pockets? No, I have no pockets in my swimming trunks. So Maxl could not be in them, of course. But I am almost—"

"Well, there you are," Owen hurried on glibly. "You sat on the beach to think, and put Maxl where you could concentrate on him, and when you were through you just forgot Maxl. He's probably still sitting on that rock—unless the tide washed him away," he added cunningly.

"Ah, my poor little Maxl!" cried Dr. Krafft, struck to the heart. He pushed his chair back and cast a troubled glance about the table. "You must excuse me, Edmund. Peter. My poor Maxl, washed away! No, no! I come, Maxl!" And he trotted briskly out of the room.

STUMM grimly went on with his oatmeal, ignoring the confusion pointedly. Owen coughed.

"If you're trying to attract my attention," Stumm observed, "remember you're a rational animal, not a dumb brute. Barking like an airedale is a poor substitute for civilized speech."

Repressing an impulse to ask Uncle Edmund what he knew about civilized speech, Owen tactfully broached the subject of *Lady Pantagruel* again. Stumm said he'd had a better offer and didn't care to discuss it.

"There was nothing but bills in the mail," Owen remarked rather daringly.

"Hold your tongue," Uncle Edmund commanded. "The basic postulate of non-allness—" Here he grew slightly confused by the magnitude of the subject he was approaching, changed his mind and drew an envelope from his inner pocket. "You saw *some* of the mail," he said. "Not all of it. I opened this before you dragged yourself tardily down to breakfast. Metro. See?" He held up the envelope, but withdrew it quickly as Owen held out his hand. "Don't snatch," he said. "I haven't the slightest thought of letting you gratify your Peeping-Tom proclivities."

Owen thought fast. "That's not Metro," he said. "I can see it."

His uncle turned the letter over, verified the printing on its face. "Astigmatic?" he inquired acidly. "Here—look."

Owen lunged forward, snatched the envelope from his uncle's hand and tore out the enclosed letter. C. Edmund Stumm, for once inarticulate, sat completely dazed and aghast, as though the oatmeal had cursed him.

A glance at the letter was all Owen needed. He tossed it back across the table, grinning into Stumm's empurpling face.

"Ten thousand more, eh?" he inquired of his gasping uncle. "Then why does

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Metro say that, in response to your inquiry, they can't raise their last offer of six months ago, which must be considered final? Uncle Edmund, you're a liar."

Uncle Edmund said in a thick, choked voice, "Peter Owen, *do you know what's going to happen?*"

"I know exactly what's going to happen," Owen said smugly. The blue clock was ready in his hand. He made a quick calculation, prepared to dodge the cream-jug if necessary, and moved time backward two minutes . . .

The bottom dropped out!

It was like his dream, only worse. He had a dizzy, disorienting feeling that he was swooping off in some hitherto unknown direction while dimensions rocked about him, though actually as he was well aware the room remained unchanged—except that Stumm was behaving very unpleasantly, putting an empty spoon into his mouth, removing it brimmed with oatmeal, depositing the cereal in his bowl and repeating the whole disgusting process.

And Dr. Krafft, conceivably gone mad with Maxl's loss, ran backward into the room, collapsed in his chair, and presently began imitating his host's nasty breakfast habits. Then both the Doctor and Stumm rose and ran backward out of the room, and—and—

The bottom dropped out faster! There was a wrenching jolt that shook Owen to his very eyeballs, and then he plunged back again in an opposite direction equally cryptic so far as orientation went. Stumm and Dr. Krafft raced into the room again, sprang into their chairs and began gobbling breakfast like starving men. Then Dr. Krafft leaped to his feet—the man couldn't sit still a minute—and darted out of the room, while C. Edmund Stumm loped up, drew an envelope out of his pocket, and—

Jolt!

Pale with fright, Owen found himself in his chair again, staring at the clock he held as though it had turned into an infuriated cobra. But it made no hostile move. It had turned time back two minutes only. For Stumm was saying:

"—dragged yourself tardily down to breakfast. Metro. See?"

Owen looked at the envelope, smiled wanly, and peeped again at the clock in his lap. He felt a cold shudder go through him. An anchor? And being pulled up? What about his dream? What would happen next? Automatically he gripped the arms of the chair. Nothing happened. Perhaps the anchor could only be pulled up while it was moving in time. . . .

"Well?" Stumm inquired in a voice like vinegar. "Of course if Miss Bishop could top Metro's offer—"

OWEN pulled himself together long enough to say firmly, "She won't. She can't. It's the highest price she can offer, and if you won't take it she'll have to find some other property, that's all. But she can't pay out money that isn't on her company's budget."

Stumm seemed taken aback. He turned the envelope over in his hands, like a man who has failed to fill a straight, and at last put it pensively in his pocket. He took up his oatmeal spoon. Owen winced at the sight of it.

"Well," Stumm murmured. "Well—*Hmm.*"

"She could give you cash on the barrel," Owen said. "A certified check for the full amount. But she can't top her last offer, and that's all there is to it."

"Certified check, eh?" the unscrupulous playwright muttered. "So. Well, perhaps I might consider it, after all. At least, it'll be all in the family, in a manner of speaking. I have a certain obligation to my own flesh and blood."

Owen jumped up. "I'll phone her," he said, and dashed toward the door. Before he could reach it the door burst open and Dr. Krafft rushed breathless into the room.

"Burglary!" Dr. Krafft cried. "I saw it through the library window! Edmund, burglars have robbed you and stolen my dear Maxl!"

We have been here before.

We have seen it all. We have not, perhaps, observed Peter Owen fumbling anxiously with the clock in his jacket

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pocket, waiting for an explosion that would force him to erase the scene yet again. But otherwise, all goes now as it went then, in serial-time tracks through paratime under the no doubt interested gaze of Wynken, Blinken and Nod.

Owen paid small attention to Krafft and Stumm. He was focusing inward with some agony of spirit upon what had just happened to him at the breakfast table. It was all very well to stand outside time, as it were, participating in these scenes like an actor on a stage, able to stop the play and step into the wings whenever he chose. But if time was going to behave like a flickering film instead of a solid stage performance, Peter Owen was not the man to meddle with it.

What *had* happened, anyhow? His giddiness was still too fresh to let him think clearly. That swan dive into the unplumbed temporal ocean gave him a chilled feeling around the innards. And yet, his wild speculation about the anchor being hauled up was simply a baseless theoretical supposition—he hoped. Very likely he could turn time back again with no repercussions at all. But might it not be wise to turn it only a few seconds at most, perhaps? And no oftener than he had to?

He didn't have to, now. All he really had to do was get Claire here and the contract signed before Chief Egan arrived to touch off the inevitable explosions that seemed to follow him about in Stumm's presence as lightning followed the cypress. Owen felt sorry for the man, but he couldn't help him. He couldn't undo the burglary, and Egan was beyond aid.

Uncle Edmund's voice slowly penetrated his thoughts. Uncle Edmund was at the hall telephone, invisible to the eye but extremely audible, making fiery remarks into the mouthpiece. As Owen's attention returned, Stumm said crisply:

"See to it, then. No dawdling, either!" He was heard to jiggle the mechanism impatiently.

"Hello, hello, operator? Get me the Mayor. What? Then look it up. I'm no city directory. Get me the Mayor, hear me? Life or death."

"Want me to handle it?" Owen asked hopefully, crossing to the door in a well-meaning attempt to divert the course of justice.

"Pah," Stumm snorted. "I shall be delighted to handle it myself. Hello? James? This is C. Edmund Stumm. I've just summoned the police to my house. Yes. *Yes!* And I demand that you fire that incompetent bamboozlehead you call a Chief of Police!"

He went on from there, almost word for word, while Owen wriggled uncomfortably. When Stumm hung up at last, with a look of malevolent smugness, Owen said,

"Ah—shall I call Miss Bishop now?"

"Why not?" Stumm asked, somewhat to his nephew's surprise. He then linked his arm companionably in Dr. Krafft's and said above the gentle babble about Maxl, "Come, Doctor, come! We have a breakfast to finish."

OWEN sighed deeply and called the Las Ondas Hotel.

"And you mean he's really going to part with *Lady Pantagruel* at last?" Claire demanded in a squeaky voice out of the instrument. She sounded much more wakeful now and in a mood of excitement. "Peter darling, you're a marvel!"

"You're another," Peter told her fondly. With glazed disinterest he watched his uncle emerge from the breakfast room carrying a cup of coffee and vanish into the pillaged library, closing the door behind him. "You'll have to hurry, darling," he told the small voice in the telephone. "You've got your lawyer with you?"

"Everything's lovely. We're on our way. Five minutes should do it, dear. I adore you." The telephone made loving noises at Owen as he laid it down. He stood there in a roseate dream, gazing at it, until a sound from the far end of the hall roused him rudely. It was the doorbell, making most unloving noises.

Owen groaned and started toward it. Egan, beyond a doubt.

Dr. Krafft's anxious form jumped for the door before Owen had taken his sec-

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ond step. The aged savant in his bereaved state had evidently been lying in wait. The police chief's great, pink visage loomed up tremendously over Krafft's white head.

"This way, this way," Krafft said, bustling forward.

Owen cried, "Wait!" in vain.

Egan was already trying the library door. He set his huge shoulder against it as Owen called, and the crackle of moisture-swollen wood drowned out his cry. The door flew open, there was a thud, and a howl of berserker fury.

CHAPTER VII

Anchor Is A-Draggin'!

DESPITE his dread, Owen had to use the clock again!

Very quickly, taking as few chances as he dared, he turned the long hand back a scant two minutes. The hall emptied as by magic. The howl of anger died upon the air. Owen dropped the clock back in his pocket, too intent even to rejoice more than perfunctorily that on this occasion no lurching through time had seized him. His whole interest was in getting to the door before Krafft could open it.

The bell rang loudly.

"Come in, come in," Owen said, jerking the door open. "Yes, yes, hello, Egan. Stand where you are! Don't move a muscle. Now wait."

"But Peter!" Dr. Krafft said anxiously, bustling toward him. "Your uncle is waiting for the gentleman."

"I know, doctor. But wait. Please let me handle this."

Dr. Krafft shrugged and subsided, turning to follow Owen's fixed stare. The three of them stood for about forty seconds, pinning the closed library door with expectant eyes. Then footsteps sounded from inside it, the knob rattled, the door groaned rebelliously on its swollen jamb, and C. Edmund Stumm staggered through as it flew open at last. He cast an angry glance at his audience down the hall and strode away, clutching his notebook.

"Now the coast is clear," Owen said with relief. "Come on. But be careful, Egan. Please be careful! Look out for that lamp."

Peering down at his guide curiously, the police chief followed him down the hall. Owen's nervousness increased to the point where Egan had begun to give him long, pensive looks by the time they reached the ravaged cabinet which was their goal.

"Tell me what happened, Pete," Egan suggested, rubbing his chin thoughtfully as he gazed upon the wreckage. Owen was about to answer, though he was getting pretty tired of this recital, when a thin, high, intermittent squeal from the hall penetrated his awareness.

"Oh, gosh!" he said abruptly. "Excuse me!" And he dashed out of the room.

The squeal came from the telephone, which now hung by its cord in midair. Owen snatched it up, gabbling, "Hello? Hello?"

"Peter!" It was Claire's voice, sounding angry. "Are you all right?"

"Sure. What happened?"

"That's what I want to know! You get me out of bed in the dawn and drag me down here to Las Ondas and then when you finally condescend to phone me, you just say, 'It's Peter," and walk calmly away. I won't stand for rudeness, Peter! I—oh, I'm going to hang up before I say something I shouldn't!" And she did.

"Oh!" Owen cried in heartfelt tones, as he realized what had happened. By turning back the clock to prevent Egan from assaulting Uncle Edmund, he had automatically erased nearly all his conversation with Claire. So naturally he hadn't told her to hurry on out to the house.

Dithering gently, Owen called the Las Ondas Hotel again. While measured ringing still sounded over the wire, the voice of C. Edmund Stumm began to shout furiously somewhere behind him. The name of Egan figured prominently in the tirade.

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"I'll kill myself!" Owen threatened wildly. He snatched for his pocket, too harried even to think now of possible menace inherent in the clock which was also an anchor. Estimating rapidly, he set back the minutes.

The house was quiet. The phone was on its cradle in the wall-niche. Taking a deep breath, he picked it up and gave the number of the hotel. When Claire came to the telephone at last, Owen was ready for her.

"Claire!" he said frantically. "I love you madly! Don't hang up again! Wait for me, please! I may have to do something vitally important, before I finish talking. But please wait!"

"Is that you, Peter?" Claire asked. "Of course I'll wait. What is it, darling?"

He told her again how fast he wanted her to come to the Stumm house. He said a quick good-by and sprinted furiously toward the front door, reaching it just as the bell sounded yet again.

This time his nonchalance was such that Egan got the impression that burglaries were so commonplace the only natural response was that of utter boredom. He got Egan safely into the library. He got Uncle Edmund out and comfortably settled under an umbrella on the patio with his notes. He was trying not to think of all those little knots of quarreling Egans and Stumms whom he had left jettisoned in time behind him, and when the doorbell rang again—he was with Egan in the library at the moment—Owen could only stand there looking in bewilderment at the police chief, who was wiping fingerprint powder off the cabinet frame. He was trying to figure out how Egan could be in the library and at the front door at the same time, and what would happen when the two Egans met.

IT took considerable effort to pull himself together, remember that just now he was not backspacing in time, and that other people than Egan might conceivably ring the doorbell. Then he went out and admitted Claire and her attorney.

Since you *must* have seen Claire Bishop's latest film, there is little point in describing her here. Then as now she had the same angelic fluff of yellow curls and the same jaunty swing to her walk. The lawyer looked like a man who had bridged the gap between humanity and the judicial servo-mechanism. He was perfectly bloodless and colorless, and for a mouth he had merely a slot through which judgments emerged at intervals from the differential analyzer inside his head. By comparison, Claire was so warmly human that Owen could scarcely bear it.

With his heart in his mouth and one hand in his pocket on the clock, Owen shuffled the characters in his personal drama into position. Egan and his aides were evicted to look for footprints on the terrace. Uncle Edmund was all but carried in on a pillow and settled with elaborate solicitude at his library desk. Claire and the lawyer were marshaled into place. Looking from Claire to her legal robot to Uncle Edmund, Owen could not help feeling she was between the devil and the deep. The attorney certainly seemed deep. His photoelectric eyes scanned the room, his mind rapidly charted a curve on a graph, and he waited in ticking silence.

Perhaps the horrid efficiency of the man cowed Uncle Edmund. Somehow the contract was unfolded on the desk in an incredibly short time. Stumm's natural procrastination failed before the lawyer's geared promptness. Owen had an odd impression that the lawyer had actually printed the contract before his very eyes, through some strange photo-engraving process, though this of course was not the case. Owen exchanged calf-like stares with Claire, the triumph of man over machine.

"Well—" Uncle Edmund said, trapped into honesty. "I suppose—ah—" He picked up his pen and fiddled with an imaginary thread in its point. He shot a glance at Claire. "Naturally I had a much taller woman in mind for Lady Pantagruel," he said offensively.

Claire drew a deep breath. Owen's hand clamped painfully on hers and she let the breath out again wordlessly.

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"Of course I've had a better offer," Uncle Edmund said, a liar to the last.

The attorney glanced at his watch, accurate to the microsecond. Uncle Edmund gave it a nervous look and put the point of his pen to the dotted line. He traced a large, ostentatious C—

The telephone at his elbow rang loudly.

Owen hurled himself forward. "I'll take it, I'll take it!" he gabbled. "Pay no attention, Uncle Edmund. Go right ahead and sign. Yes, yes, hello?"

The attorney regarded the phone with some mild interest, as though he too, in his younger days, had been a telephone switchboard.

There was some confusion at the other end of the wire. A plaintive voice kept saying that Los Angeles was calling. But a deeper voice drowned it out, demanding to speak to Chief Egan.

"It's for Egan," Owen told his waiting uncle, who was gazing coldly at him, eyebrows raised, pen divorced from the lines it had just been tracing. Owen stepped to the broken French door, trying to still the wild beating of his heart, and shouted for the police chief. A voice replied from the edge of the terrace and Egan came lumbering toward the door. Just in time Owen diverted him to another entrance. "You can take it on the hall extension," he said rapidly. "A phone call, I mean. For you. That way, over there."

Stumm had pressed his hand to his forehead. Owen gazed at him with thumping heart.

"Well?" Claire said in a voice that for acid matched Stumm's best efforts. But she fell silent at an admonitory glance from the attorney.

"My nerves," Stumm said faintly, and made the mistake of meeting the lawyer's cold, judicial eye. A coward, like all bullies, he took up the pen again. He gazed from face to face around the room, apparently trying to find some excuse for what could prove a profitable delay. But Claire had been well schooled. She might never have heard of Shostakovich. Owen held his breath as Uncle Edmund traced the initial E of his middle name. The sound of pen on paper scratched loud in the silence.

"You dirty, double-crossing yellow rat!"

INCREDIBLY, it was Chief Egan's voice that thundered horribly through the room. Uncle Edmund's pen clattered to the desk from nerveless fingers. Chairs scraped and creaked as all present jerked around incredulously to stare at the open doorway, blocked now by the vast blue bulk of the Chief. That there might be no doubt whom he was addressing, Egan shot out a mighty arm, pointed straight at Uncle Edmund, and going even more crimson in the face than before, bellowed:

"You sneaking, chiseling little skunk! Get me fired, will you? That's a low-down, dirty trick!"

Owen moaned pitifully and leaped to his feet.

"Oh, no, no, not now!" he cried, springing forward distractedly. "Egan, wait!"

But Egan was beyond appeal. Brushing Owen aside, he strode forward toward the desk, pushing back his cuff with horrible intent to free the great pink mallet of his fist.

"I've been wanting to do this for months and months," he declared, advancing upon the appalled and speechless Stumm. "I couldn't do it in uniform. But I'm a civilian now! This is going to be worth whatever it costs me!"

Kicking chairs out of his path, he advanced like Juggernaut itself, rounded the corner of the desk and with a resounding crack of fist on flesh knocked C. Edward Stumm over backward.

There was involuntary rash applause from Claire. The attorney didn't stir. He seemed to be analyzing the whole affair with admirable detachment. Owen clawed out the blue enamel clock, striving in vain to steady his shaking fingers. Time turned backward. . . .

* * * * *

This time it was worse than before. That terrible disorientation gripped Owen in a gigantic pendulum-swing

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as the bottom dropped out of creation. Frantically he threw himself at a chair and wound his arms around it, trying to anchor himself like a limpet. But the chair melted into mist as he plummeted through time. He had one fading glimpse of Uncle Edmund, grimacing like a demon, ripping the contract in halves in lieu of Egan.

Then the pendulum swung wide, daylight gave place to dark, and Owen heard thunder roll and saw the library stroboscopically illumined by lightning. He was swinging farther than before, back into last night. And then forward. . . .

Snap!

He was groveling on the floor before the desk, as though in pleading abnegation before a throne. Claire and the lawyer were peering down at him. From behind the desk sounded the scratch of pen on paper, instantly suspended as Stumm said crossly, "What in the world —Peter?"

The telephone rang.

Owen sprang up as from a catapult, snatched the telephone from beneath his uncle's descending hand. Stumm jerked back in terror. "Don't *do* that!" he complained. But Owen scarcely heard him. He was listening again to the brief argument between long distance and the Mayor. Again the Mayor triumphed.

"He just left," Owen babbled in response to the inquiry about Egan. "Too late to catch him now. Try Headquarters. He won't be back here. Never. No use trying."

He then hung up convulsively, noticed that he still held the clock in his hand, and dropped it into his pocket with a feeble smile around the circle of faces turned to him in astonishment. Claire seemed distressed, the lawyer was running a brief sanity test based on observable data, and Stumm had a stuffed look of affront.

"Wrong number," Owen said feebly. Stumm favored him with a long, steady glare.

Then he picked up the pen and signed the contract. . . .

Owen let out a tremendous sigh of relief. Stumm glared at him, threw down the pen and shoved the contract across the desk. The attorney rose stiffly.

"Witnesses, please," he said.

"To a contract of sale?" Stumm asked. "Is that usual?"

"Advisable in this case," the attorney said in a voice that brooked no argument.

"All right, I'll witness it," Owen said. "Where do I sign?"

"No, not you," the attorney said, giving him a slow, measuring look. "Blood relation. Need disinterested witnesses." What he really meant, as Owen knew very well, was that a witness had to be of sound mind. He was too crushed to resent the implication.

AT this fortuitous moment Dr. Krafft was seen trotting briskly across the terrace outside.

"Chief Egan!" he was heard to call in his mild though agitated tones. "Chief Egan, is there any trace of my little Max!?"

"Dr. Krafft!" Owen bellowed. Then, shocked at the volume of his own voice, he stepped to the door and spoke more mildly. "Dr. Krafft, would you step in here a moment? We need a witness to Uncle Edmund's signature."

"Two witnesses," the lawyer said decisively.

"Ah yes, of course," Dr. Krafft said, beaming. "Delighted, delighted. My dear Chief, perhaps you will do for the other party? Come!"

Gulping, Owen stood back to let them in. After all, the contract had been signed. The worst was surely over. But he kept his hand on the clock, praying fervently that he need never risk using it again, as he watched Dr. Krafft affix his (highly negotiable) autograph to the page.

Egan, true to form, made a little awkwardness about signing. He wanted to be sure what he was putting his name to. Blushing but adamant, he took the contract to the window to examine it. Owen kept his hand firm on the clock, his eye on Egan and his ears intent for the fatal ringing of the phone.

Egan, ponderously satisfied, put the

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contract flat on the window-pane and scrawled his name laboriously on the page. He had not quite finished when again the telephone burst into furious ringing.

"Allow me!" Uncle Edmund snapped angrily, forestalling Owen's dive with a deft motion. "Hello, hello? Yes, naturally this is C. Edmund Stumm. Whom did you expect? I—oh, *Metro!*" His voice turned to syrup.

The room was gripped in a trance of silence. In it the tiny buzzing voice from the receiver spoke as clearly as a hornet might, given human speech.

"I am instructed to tell you, Mr. Stumm," the hornet said, "that we have reconsidered our position on *Lady Pantagruel*. Our office has just signed Jessica Tandy, and we want your play as her first starring vehicle. We're prepared to pay the additional ten thousand, if the play is still available."

"Of *course* it's available!" Uncle Edmund cried heartily. "I—ah—I'll call you back in five minutes. Thank *you*. Goodbye!"

He hung up with a sort of sliding obliqueness, because he was already out of his chair and diving for Egan and the contract.

"Give me that document!" he snapped. "Egan, you hear me? Hand it over quick, before I have you fired!"

"Egan—*no!*" Owen cried wildly, jumping forward. "Don't you do it! He signed it! It's Claire's!"

"Prove it!" Uncle Edmund shouted. "I'll fight you in every court in the land! You and your thieving friends knew Metro would meet my price! No wonder you were in such a hurry to bilk me!"

"Why, you—you conceited old toad!" Claire gasped in a fury.

"Claire!" Owen begged, swirling in circles. "Egan, please! Uncle Edmund!"

"Egan!" Uncle Edmund said in a commanding voice. "Remember who I am. Hand over my property or I'll have you out of your job before sundown!"

"Oh, what a liar!" Owen babbled. "Egan, he's got you fired already. Go on, get mad at him! The Mayor just made you resign—don't you remember? I know it never happened—I mean, it *did* happen, but you don't know it! Egan!"

But Egan, gazing at Owen with alarm, as well he might, was already handing the contract into Stumm's outstretched grasp. . . .

Owen groaned, took out the clock, and with a sinking heart turned the hands back five minutes, knowing dimly that this time he was probably going too far.

He was perfectly right.

CHAPTER VIII

Guided Missile

HORRIBLY, the bottom dropped, with a jolt, out of all creation!

There was a terrific wrench that seemed to tear Owen free from his very eyeteeth, and clutching the clock in a grip of death he went spinning dizzily into unknowable dimensions. The anchor was being hoisted in nasty, jerking tugs while Owen at the very end of its chain swung like a pendulum through time.

Now the storm of last night thundered again. Temporally diffused lightning gave the library a dim gray radiance. Through the window Owen saw the cypress spring back triumphant from its watery grave and vigorously reroot itself. Again that yanking tug. He was ascending, in some direction he couldn't understand, and the pendulum of time swung wider.

It swung tremendously, far behind the limits the clock had imposed. He had a lunatic glimpse of a cheerful, drooling infant whom he identified with himself in earlier years. He saw a bearded old gentleman he dimly remembered as his grandfather, and noticed Indians morosely building a mission on the terrace under a much younger and more lissom cypress. The pendulum paused at the end of its swing. For a flashing instant everything was solid and real again. But before he could get his footing the

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lurch forward began and he swept helplessly with it, faster, this trip, right up to the moment when Claire, the lawyer, Egan, Dr. Krafft, Stumm and himself stood together around the desk.

And still forward!

Faces and events flashed past in a stew of incoherence. He thought he saw himself with a gray beard and Claire sweetly dithering into senility, while their great-grandchildren clustered lovingly around them. Again there was a pause and a tug, and the faces vanished.

Owen felt perfectly convinced that he was being pulled up with the anchor to explode like a deep-sea fish when he reached the surface of normal-time, scattering himself through many centuries. He wanted desperately to let go of the clock, but he didn't dare. Momentum might carry him off, lubricated as he was with that damned temporal draught, so that he'd go slipping down the greased runways to—to *when?*

"No, no," he gibbered to himself. "How will I look splashed all through a millennium? It wasn't worth it. Nothing's worth this!" There was a jolt and all motion stopped.

Then he was swinging again. Time had become a constant and space fluid, and he swept spinning backward past the signing of the contract, past the immolation of the cypress, into the beginnings of the storm.

It was a shorter swing this time. As the anchor rose the arcs seemed to grow briefer. He paused in the red light of yesterday's sunset and began again to sweep through the interminable recurrence of last night.

Owen shut his eyes, unable to face the prospect of watching the cypress struck down again by its relentless destiny. He opened them just in time to see something that made him catch his breath. Something, in fact, that would put victory in his grasp if he could ever come to a halt long enough to use it.

He was sweeping through the early hours of last night. Moving in rapid sequence, telescoped in time, he saw Uncle Edmund's diabolic face outside the closed French door of the library. He saw the brick clenched in Stumm's fist as he cocked an eye toward the sky. Thunder crashed, and with it crashed the brick, straight through the glass door.

Dazed, Owen saw his unregenerate uncle dart into the room, hurl the brick at the wall-cabinet, and with both gloved hands flashing furiously, begin to scoop out the valuable and hideous gold coins. Moving like lightning, the self-made criminal dashed across the room to the safe, whirled it open and decanted the coins into it more rapidly than light itself. At the last moment he was seen to glance around the room, meet the eye of a small green toad squatting on the desk, and with a darting motion hurl Maxl in after the coins, slamming the safe door behind him.

So now it was all clear—too late. C. Edmund Stumm himself was the burglar who had looted the library. With his customary lack of ethics, Stumm had killed a number of birds with one well-aimed stone. Bills had been mounting up. The coins were insured, of course. And Uncle Edmund had presumably believed last night that Claire wouldn't buy *Lady Pantagruel* under any circumstances, after their difference of opinion on Shostakovich.

So he had committed the robbery, which would not only enrich him without cost but would wreak vengeance on Chief Egan and remove Maxl so that Dr. Krafft would waste no more time on experiments that might be better spent helping Stumm with his new play.

SHOCKED but not surprised, Owen shook his head. Then he realized that he had very little concern in mundane matters, after all. The anchor was still rising in sickening jerks. Very soon now Owen would pop out into paratime clinging like a barnacle to the anchor, only to explode all over creation.

Skimming through time, he caught a brief, telescoping glimpse of himself and Dr. Krafft conferring over an endlessly multiplied glass of beer, and the gentle old savant's words came back to him echoingly—action and reaction, uni-

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versal physical laws, an instaneous object—and the result of running into another time-traveler. What if he did? The momentum might at least break up this endless swinging.

Another time-traveler was the only conceivable body in paratime that *could* collide with his.

"Wait!" Owen commanded himself suddenly, and quite uselessly, of course. "Another time-traveler?" Of course there was one. The clock! He and the clock together, lubricated to frictionless smoothness, hurtling from end to end of time.

If he threw the clock away, what would happen? Some dim recollection of recoil principles stirred in his mind. A man in free space might move himself by throwing an object away from him into the void.

He drew back his arm for the toss—and held it motionless as a new thought flashed through his mind. He was, after all, C. Edmund Stumm's own nephew. And he could kill two birds with one stone quite as well as his uncle had done. He saw it all in one beautiful, blinding glimpse.

If Dr. Krafft's ideas were not all nonsense, it ought to work. Dr. Krafft's beloved tesseracts, which he had tried to push into three-dimensional cubes by throwing energy at them through time. It had never actually worked, in practise. It never had worked in a three-dimensional world. But that didn't mean it couldn't, if the basic idea were sound. If an object actually moving through time—like a clock—were to impinge hard on a solid cube—like a safe—strange things would result.

With furious patience, Owen waited for the moment of stasis that came at the end of each swing. They were growing quite short now. He paused for an instant in the fluid center of the breakfast room, watching Stumm and Dr. Krafft greedily beginning their thousandth several breakfast with undiminished appetite, though Owen was by now sick at the very sight of oatmeal. He saw them whirl away as he swept forward through time, slowed, drew nearer and nearer a library scene in which a twitching tableau stood, Stumm holding out his demanding hand toward the hesitating Egan with the contract.

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SHADOW ON THE SAND

a novel of twin worlds

by

JOHN D. MacDONALD

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Time paused. Owen collected all his strength, and just as he felt the beginning of the backward tug, hurled the clock with all his power past Stumm's head at the safe in the wall.

The result was startling, though supremely logical.

A RUBBER ball hurled hard against a floating box will move the box very slightly, while the ball itself, with less mass, will rebound. But the box *will* move. Physical law requires it to move —in space.

The clock was moving in time as well as in space. Its physical mass was naturally not enough to budge the safe a hairsbreadth, in space. But time is measured otherwise. A few micrometers in space might not be noticeable to the casual glance, but a few seconds or minutes in time are a different matter entirely.

The impact of the clock, in short, knocked the safe into a tesseract.

Rebounding violently, the clock then shot off into infinity at an angle the eye could not follow, and was seen no more by mortal eyes. But the safe seemed to jolt, to stir, and then to unpleat like an accordion. What it looked like is impossible to say, since no words exist to describe the motion of a tesseract through its native dimension. But the result of that motion is quite easy to name. Transparency.

Jolt! Snap!

"Most unethical," the lawyer was murmuring, as Egan held out the papers.

"Egan!" shrieked Owen, collapsing heavily on the floor, not even aware that he was real again. "Egan, wait! Look!" And his outflung finger pointed at the safe.

"For the love of Pete!" Egan said dazedly, stepping back and dropping his hand. "Stumm, look! *What is it?*"

Stumm's clawing grasp just missed the contract, and the tone of Egan's voice made him whirl, expecting some sudden horror at his back.

All eyes were now turned toward the safe, and for an instant utter silence reigned.

Then, with a heartstirring cry of "*Maxl!*" Dr. Krafft bounded forward. His outstretched hands went through the temporally exploded safe as though its steel walls were air. It is a sad and ironic fact that not until much later did he realize at all what he had done. The culmination of a lifetime's experimenting took place successfully for the first and last time before his eyes, but all he saw just then was the broad green grin of Maxl, and reunion with his dear frog was the only thing that mattered.

FAR otherwise it was for Police Chief Egan. For Maxl squatted on a perfectly visible heap of gold coins, compressed into a tight mass by the invisible walls of the safe.

"That's the coin collection," Egan said dazedly. "But I thought it was supposed to have been stolen!" Slowly he turned toward C. Edmund Stumm. Slowly his face hardened. "Oh," he said. "I—I think I get it. Yeah, I think I get it!"

"Nonsense!" Stumm blustered. "Ridiculous! I have no idea how—how—" The playwright's face was a picture of guilty confusion as his words faded faintly away.

"But what's *happening?*" Claire demanded, her voice rising to a squeak of confusion. "The safe! Look at it! It makes me dizzy. I—I think I'm going to —to faint or something."

Gladly Owen flung his arms about her. "It's nothing, darling," he said. "Don't look at it. Naturally it makes you dizzy, but never mind. It's contracting again. In a minute or two it'll be right back in shape. I wonder why? Temporal metallic memory? Or is it just catching up with itself in time?"

No one paid any attention to these mad words. All eyes were fixed glazedly on the slowly solidifying cube of the safe.

All eyes, that is, but the photoelectric lenses of the attorney. Clearing his throat significantly, he stepped forward.

"Chief Egan," he said, "may I trouble you for our contract?"

"The contract!" Stumm screamed, re-

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called to life by the magic word. "It's mine! Egan, I demand it!"

Egan turned his massive head slowly. "What contract?" he asked. Then he turned his back deliberately toward Owen and put his hand behind him. The contract flipped significantly, like an albino robin's tail.

Owen's hand closed on the paper. Egan let go. The large hand curled so that finger and thumb made a definitive O of satisfaction. The attorney, who had apparently not noticed this byplay, thrust a certified check into Stumm's limp hand.

"Oh, the contract," Owen said above the fluff of fragrant yellow curls pressed to his cheek. "Why, I have it, Uncle Edmund. All signed, sealed and witnessed. Claire and I will be going now. By the way, I quit. I'm sure you and Chief Egan will have a lot—an awful lot—to say to each other!"

The rest was silence, except for the violent cursing of C. Edmund Stumm.

* * * * *

The reader will be pleased to learn that Stumm was prosecuted to the full extent of the law and departed from Las Ondas forever, in the shadow of deep disgrace.

As for Fred Egan, he was confirmed as Chief of Police and occupies the office to this day, to the great good fortune of old ladies, small children and drunks whom he sees carefully home at night, to the satisfaction of all.

Dr. Krafft and his dear Maxl went home to Connecticut and immersed themselves once more in experiments with tesseracts, though of course they never proved anything.

And penultimately, *Lady Pantagruel* in film was a great box office success, though naturally not an artistic one. It launched the happily married Claire and Owen on a long and promising career as manager-actress team. They have two beautiful children already, and hope for more.

Finally, as for Wynken, Blinken and Nod, they secured a more fool-proof anchor and went on voyaging through paratime into the glamorous past. And they live happily ever before.

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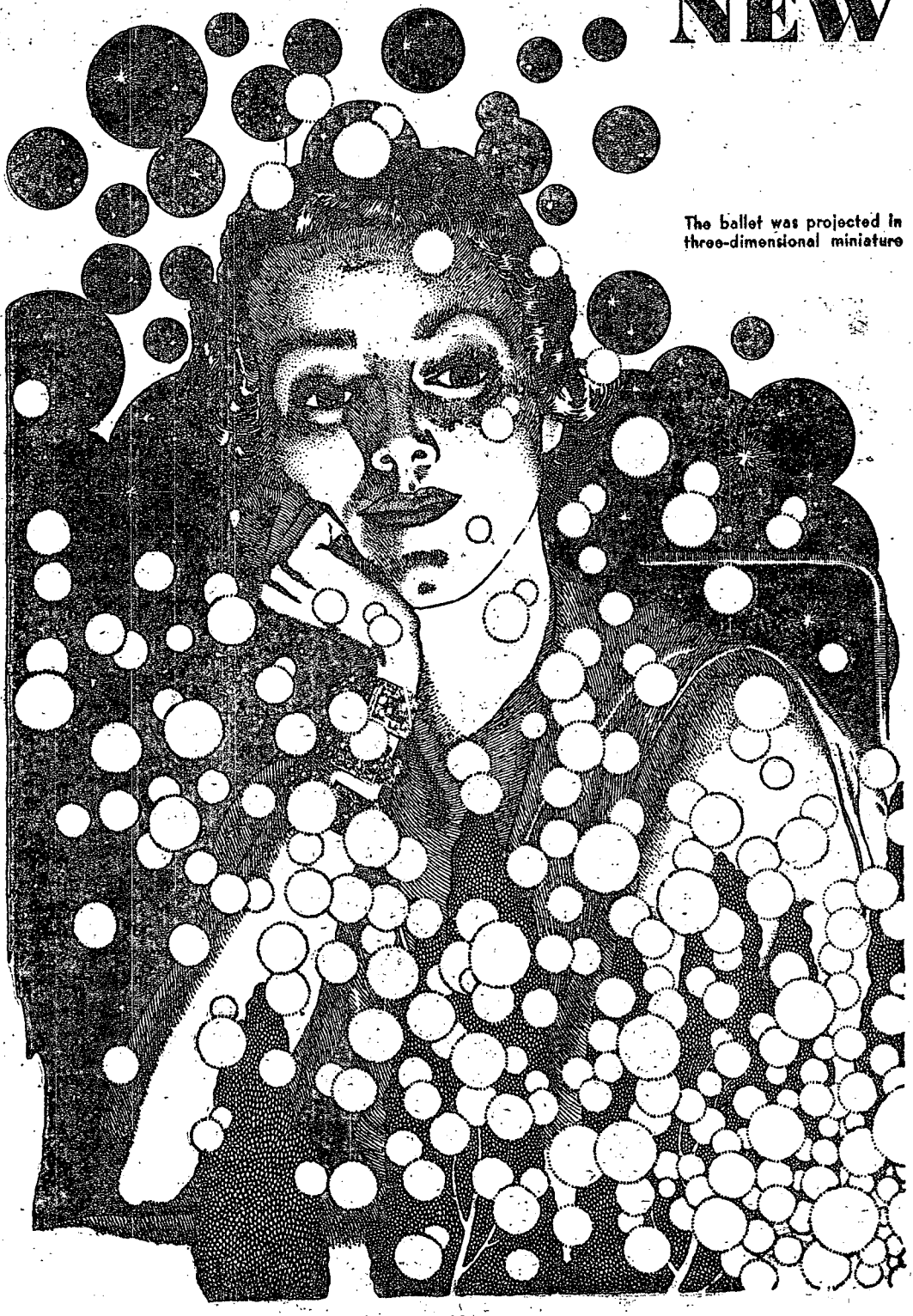

The ballet was projected in three-dimensional miniature

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BODIES FOR OLD

a complete novelet by JACK VANCE

CHAPTER I

Roll of the Dice

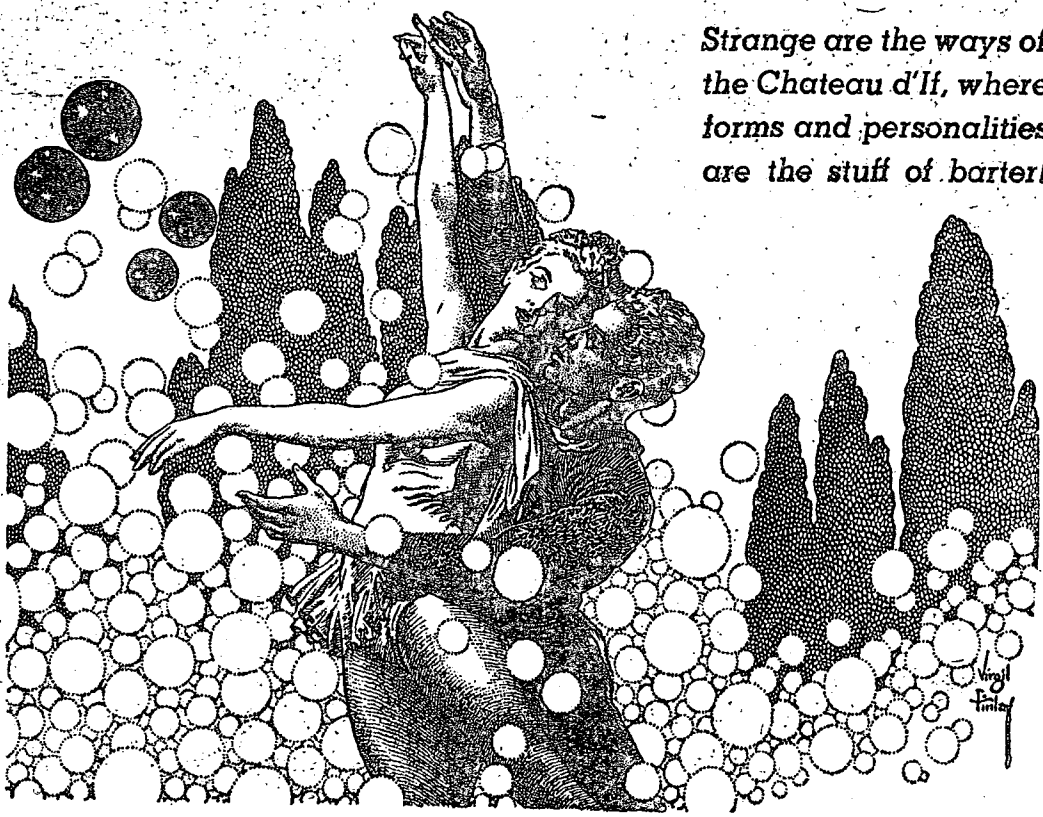
THE advertisement appeared on a telescreen commercial, and a few days later at the side of the news-fax. The copy was green on a black background, a modest rectangle among the oranges, reds, yellows. The punch was carried in the message:

Jaded? Bored?
Want ADVENTURE?
Try the Chateau d'If.

The Oxonian Terrace was a pleasant area of quiet in the heart of the city—a red-flagged rectangle dotted with beach umbrellas, tables, lazy people. A bank of magnolia trees screened off the street and filtered out most of the street noise; the leakage, a soft sound like surf, underlay the conversation and the irregular *thud-thud-thud* from the Oxonian handball courts.

Roland Mario sat in complete relaxation, half-slumped, head back, feet propped on the spun-air and glass table—in the same posture as his four companions. Watching them under half-closed lids, Mario pondered the ancient mystery of human personality. How

Strange are the ways of the Chateau d'If, where forms and personalities are the stuff of barter!



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could men be identical and yet each completely unique?

To his left sat Breaugh, a calculator repairman. He had a long bony nose, round eyes, heavy black eyebrows, a man deft with his fingers, methodical and patient. He had a Welsh name, and he looked the pure ancient Welsh type, the small dark men that had preceded Caesar, preceded the Celts.

Next to him sat Janniver. North Europe, Africa, the Orient had combined to shape his brain and body. An accountant by trade, he was a tall spare man with short yellow hair. He had a long face with features that first had been carved, then kneaded back, blunted. He was cautious, thoughtful, a tough opponent on the handball court.

Zaer was the quick one, the youngest of the group. Fair-skinned with red cheeks, dark curly hair, eyes gay as valentines, he talked the most, laughed the most, occasionally lost his temper.

Beside him sat Ditmar, a sardonic man with keen narrow eyes, a high forehead, and a dark bronze skin from Polynesia, the Sudan, or India, or South America. He played no handball, consumed fewer highballs than the others, because of a liver disorder. He occupied a well-paying executive position with one of the television networks.

And Mario himself, how did they see him? He considered. Probably a different picture in each of their minds, although there were few pretensions or striking features to his exterior. He had nondescript pleasant features, hair and eyes without distinction, skin the average golden-brown. Medium height, medium weight, quiet-spoken, quietly dressed. He knew he was well-liked, so far as the word had meaning among the five; they had been thrown together not so much by congeniality as by the handball court and a common bachelorhood.

Mario became aware of the silence. He finished his highball. "Anyone go another round?"

Breaugh made a gesture of assent.

"I've got enough," said Janniver.

Zaer tilted the glass down his throat, set it down with a thud. "At the age of four I promised my father never to turn down a drink."

Ditmar hesitated, then said, "Might as well spend my money on liquor as anything else."

"That's all money is good for," said Breaugh. "To buy a little fun into your life."

"A lot of money buys a lot of fun," said Ditmar morosely. "Try and get the money."

ZAER gestured, a wide fanciful sweep of the arm. "Be an artist, an inventor, create something, build something. There's no future working for wages."

"Look at this new crop of school-boy wonders," said Breaugh sourly. "Where in the name of get-out do they come from? Spontaneous generation by the action of sunlight on slime? . . . All of a sudden, nothing but unsung geniuses, everywhere you look. De Satz, Coley—atomicians. Honn, Versovitch, Lekky, Brule, Richards — administrators. Gandelip, New, Cardosa — financiers. Dozens of them, none over twenty-three, twenty-four. All of 'em come up like meteors."

"Don't forget Pete Zaer," said Zaer. "He's another one, but he hasn't meteored yet. Give him another year."

"Well," muttered Ditmar, "maybe it's a good thing. Somebody's got to do our thinking for us. We're fed, we're clothed, we're educated, we work at soft jobs, and good liquor's cheap. That's all life means for ninety-nine out of a hundred."

"If they'd only take the hangover out of the liquor," sighed Zaer.

"Liquor's a release from living," said Janniver somberly. "Drunkenness is about the only adventure left. Drunkenness and death."

"Yes," said Breaugh. "You can always show contempt for life by dying."

Zaer laughed. "Whisky or cyanide. Make mine whisky."

Fresh highballs appeared. They shook dice for the tag. Mario lost, signed the check.

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After a moment Breaugh said, "It's true though. Drunkenness and death. The unpredictables. The only two places left to go—unless you can afford twenty million dollars for a planetary rocket. And even then there's only dead rock after you get there."

Ditmar said, "You overlooked a third possibility."

"What's that?"

"The Chateau d'If."

All sat quiet; then all five shifted in their chairs, settling back or straightening themselves.

"Just what is the Chateau d'If?" asked Mario.

"*Where* is it?" asked Zaer. "The advertisement said 'Try the Chateau d'If,' but it said nothing about how or where."

Janniver grunted. "Probably a new nightclub."

Mario shook his head doubtfully. "The advertisement gave a different impression."

"It's not a night club," said Ditmar. All eyes swung to him. "No, I don't know what it is. I know *where* it is, but only because there's been rumors a couple months now."

"What kind of rumors?"

"Oh—nothing definite. Just hints. To the effect that *if* you want adventure, *if* you've got money to pay for it, *if* you're willing to take a chance, *if* you have no responsibilities you can't abandon—"

"If—if—if," said Breaugh with a grin. "The Chateau d'If."

Ditmar nodded. "That's it exactly."

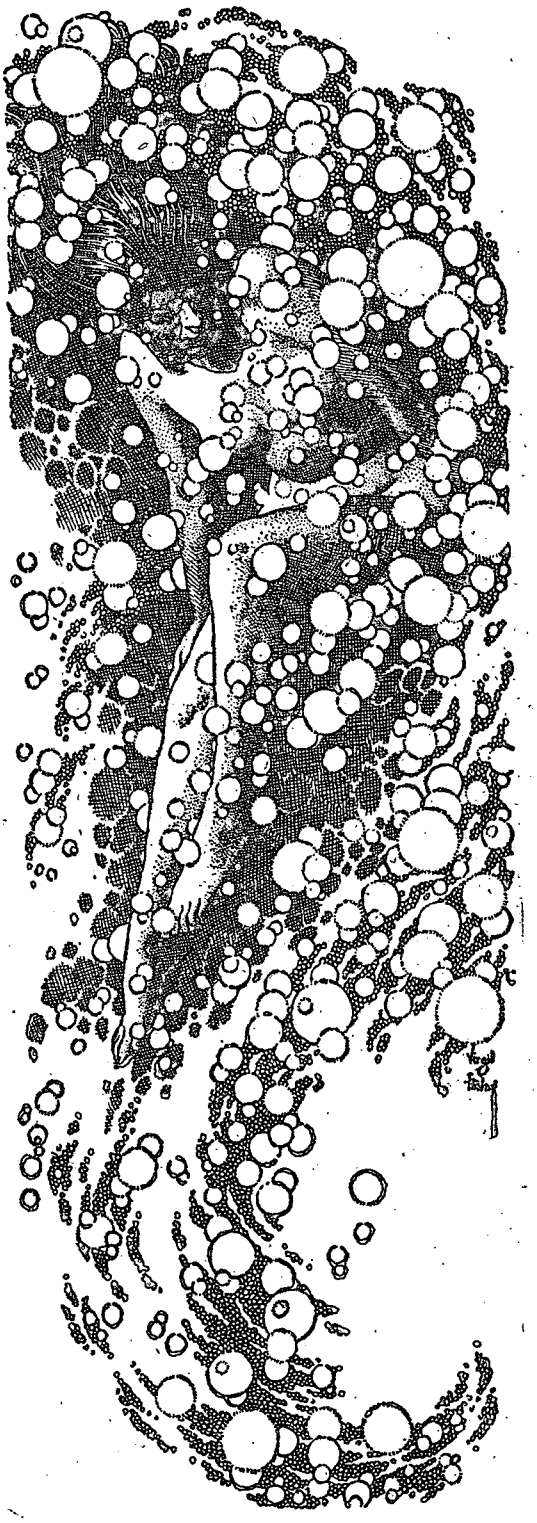
"Is it dangerous?" asked Zaer. "If all they do is string a tight-wire across a snake-pit, turn a tiger loose at you, and you can either walk tight-rope or fight tiger, I'd rather sit here and drink high-balls and figure how to beat Janniver in the tournament."

Ditmar shrugged. "I don't know."

Breaugh frowned. "It could be a dope-den, a new kind of bordello."

"There's no such thing," said Zaer. "It's a haunted house with real ghosts."

"If we're going to include fantasy," said Ditmar, "a time machine."



A blonde girl, young and sweet, sat on the edge of a pool, in a cloud of silver bubbles

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"If," said Breaugh.

There was a short ruminative silence.

"It's rather peculiar," said Mario. "Ditmar says there's been rumors a couple months now. And last week there's an advertisement."

"What's peculiar about it?" asked Janniver. "That's the sequence in almost any new enterprise."

Breaugh said quickly, "That's the key word—'enterprise'. The Chateau d'If is not a natural phenomenon; it's a man-created object, idea, process—whatever it is. The motive behind it is a human motive—probably money."

"What else?" asked Zaer whimsically.

BREAUGH raised his black eyebrows high. "Oh, you never know. Now, it can't be a criminal enterprise, otherwise the ACP would be swarming all over it."

Ditmar leaned back, swung Breaugh a half-mocking look. "The Agency of Crime Prevention can't move unless there's an offense, unless someone signs a complaint. If there's no overt offense, no complaint, the law can't move."

Breaugh made an impatient gesture. "Very true. But that's a side-issue to the idea I was trying to develop."

Ditmar grinned. "Sorry. Go on."

"What are the motives which prompt men to new enterprises? First, money, which in a sense comprises, includes, all of the other motives too. But for the sake of clarity, call this first, the desire for money, an end in itself. Second, there's the will for power. Subdivide that last into, say, the crusading instinct and call it a desire for unlimited sexual opportunity. Power over women. Then third, curiosity, the desire to know. Fourth, the enterprise for its own sake, as a diversion. Like a millionaire's race-horses. Fifth, philanthropy. Any more?"

"Covers it," said Zaer.

"Possibly the urge for security, such as the Egyptian pyramids," suggested Janniver.

"I think that's the fundamental motive behind the first category, the lust for money."

"Artistic spirit, creativeness."

"Oh, far-fetched, I should say."

"Exhibitionism," Ditmar put forward.

"Equally far-fetched."

"I disagree. A theatrical performance is based solely and exclusively, from the standpoint of the actors, upon their mania for exhibitionism."

Breaugh shrugged. "You're probably right."

"Religious movements, missions."

"Lump that under the will to administer power."

"It sticks out at the edges."

"Not far. . . . That all? Good. What does it give us? Anything suggestive?"

"The Chateau d'If!" mused Janniver. "It still sounds like an unnecessarily florid money-making scheme."

"It's not philanthropy—at least superficially," said Mario. "But probably we could fabricate situations that would cover any of your cases."

Ditmar made an impatient gesture. "Talk's useless. What good is it? Not any of us know for sure. Suppose it's a plot to blow up the city?"

Breaugh said coolly, "I appoint you a committee of one, Ditmar, to investigate and report."

Ditmar laughed sourly. "I'd be glad to. But I've got a better idea. Let's roll the dice. Low man applies to the Chateau d'If—financed by the remaining four."

Breaugh nodded. "Suits me. I'll roll with you."

Ditmar looked around the table.

"What's it cost?" asked Zaer.

Ditmar shook his head. "I've no idea. Probably comes high."

Zaer frowned, moved uneasily in his seat. "Set a limit of two thousand dollars per capita."

"Good, so far as I'm concerned. Janniver?"

The tall man with the short yellow hair hesitated. "Yes, I'll roll. I've nothing to lose."

"Mario?"

"Suits me."

Ditmar took up the dice box, cupped it with his hand, rattled the dice. "The

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rules are for poker dice. One throw, ace high. In other words, a pair of aces beats a pair of sixes. Straight comes between three of a kind and a full house. That suit everybody? . . . Who wants to roll first?"

"Go ahead, shoot," said Mario mildly.

DITMAR shook, shook, shook, turned the dice out. Five bodies leaned forward, five pair of eyes followed the whirling cubes. They clattered down the table, clanged against a highball glass, came to rest.

"Looks like three fives," said Ditmar. "Well, that's medium good."

Mario, sitting on his left, picked up the box, tossed the dice in, shook, threw. He grunted. A two, a three, a four, a five, a four. "Pair of fours. Ouch."

Breaugh threw silently. "Three aces."

Janniver threw. "Two pair. Deuces and threes."

Zaer, a little pale, picked up the dice. He flashed a glance at Mario. "Pair of fours to beat." He shook the dice, shook —then threw with a sudden flourish. Clang, clatter among the glasses. Five pairs of eyes looked. Ace, deuce, three, six, deuce.

"Pair of deuces."

Zaer threw himself back with a tight grin. "Well, I'm game. I'll go. It's supposed to be an adventure. Of course they don't say whether you come out alive or not."

"You should be delighted," said Breaugh, stuffing tobacco in his pipe. "After all it's our money that's buying you this mysterious thrill."

Zaer made a helpless gesture with both hands. "Where do I go? What do I do?" He looked at Ditmar. "Where do I get this treatment?"

"I don't know," said Ditmar. "I'll ask at the studio. Somebody knows somebody who's been there. Tomorrow about this time I'll have the details, as much as I can pick up, at any rate."

Now came a moment of silence—a silence combined of several peculiar qualities. Each of the five contributed a component, but which the wariness, which the fear, which the quiet satisfaction, it was impossible to say.

Breaugh set down his glass. "Well, Zaer, what do you think? Ready for the tight-rope or the tiger?"

"Better take a pair of brass-knuckles or a ring-flash," said Ditmar with a grin.

Zaer glanced around the circle of eyes, laughed ruefully. "The interest you take in me is flattering."

"We want a full report. We want you to come out alive."

Zaer said, "I want to come out alive too. Who's going to stake me to the smelling salts and adrenalin, in case the adventure gets really adventurous?"

"Oh, you look fit enough," said Breaugh. He rose to his feet. "I've got to feed my cats. There's the adventure in my life—taking care of seven cats. Quite a futile existence. The cats love it." He gave a sardonic snort. "We're living a life men have dreamed of living ever since they first dreamed. Food, leisure, freedom. We don't know when we're well off."

CHAPTER II

Changed Man

ZAER was scared. He held his arms tight against his body, and his grin, while wide and ready as ever, was a half-nervous grimace, twisted off to the side. He made no bones about his apprehension, and sat in his chair on the terrace like a prizefighter waiting for the gong.

Janniver watched him solemnly, drinking beer. "Maybe the *idea* of the Chateau d'If is adventure enough."

" 'What is adventure?' asked jesting Zaer, and did not stay for the answer," said Breaugh, eyes twinkling. He loaded his pipe.

"Adventure is just another name for having the daylights scared out of you and living to tell about it," said Zaer wretchedly.

Mario laughed. "If you never show up

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again, we'll know it wasn't a true adventure."

Breaugh craned his neck around. "Where's Ditmar? He's the man with all the information."

"Here he comes," said Zaer. "I feel like a prisoner."

"Oh, the devil!" said Breaugh. "You don't need to go through with it if you don't want to. After all, it's just a lark. No matter of life or death."

Zaer shook his head. "No, I'll try her on."

Ditmar pulled up a chair, punched the service button, ordered beer. Without preamble he said, "It costs eight thousand. It costs *you* eight thousand, that is. There's two levels. Type A costs ten million; Type B, ten thousand, but they'll take eight. Needless to say, none of us can go two and a half million, so you're signed up on the Type B schedule."

Zaer grimaced. "Don't like the sound of it. It's like a fun house at the carnival. Some of 'em go through the bumps, others stand around watching, waiting for somebody's dress to blow up. And there's the lad who turns the valves, throws the switches. He has the real fun."

Ditmar said, "I've already paid the eight thousand, so you fellows can write me checks. We might as well get that part over now, while I've got you all within reach."

He tucked the checks from Mario, Janniver and Breaugh into his wallet. "Thanks." He turned to Zaer. "This evening at six o'clock, go to this address." He pushed a card across the table. "Give whoever answers the door this card."

Breaugh and Mario, on either side of Zaer, leaned over, scrutinized the card along with Zaer. It read:

THE CHATEAU D'IF
5600 Exmoor Avenue
Meadowlands

In the corner were scribbled the words: "Zaer, by Sutlow."

"I had to work like blazes to get it," said Ditmar. "It seems they're keeping it exclusive. I had to swear to all kinds of things about you. Now for heaven's sake, Zaer, don't turn out to be an ACP agent or I'm done with Sutlow, and he's my boss."

"ACP?" Zaer raised his eyebrows. "Is it—illegal?"

"I don't know," said Ditmar. "That's what I'm spending two thousand dollars on you for."

"I hope you have a damn good memory," said Breaugh with a cool grin. "Because—if you live—I want two thousand dollars' worth of vicarious adventure."

"If I die," retorted Zaer, "buy yourself a Ouija board; I'll still give you your money's worth."

"Now," said Ditmar, "we'll meet here Tuesdays and Fridays at three—right, fellows?"—he glanced around the faces—"until you show up."

Zaer rose. "Okay. Tuesdays and Fridays at three. Be seeing you." He waved a hand that took in them all, and stumbling slightly, walked away.

"Poor kid," said Breaugh. "He's scared stiff."

TUESDAY passed. Friday passed. Another Tuesday, another Friday, and Tuesday came again. Mario, Ditmar, Breaugh, Janniver reached their table at three o'clock, and with subdued greetings, took their seats.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed. Conversation trickled to a halt. Janniver sat square to the table, big arms resting beside his beer, occasionally scratching at his short yellow hair, or rubbing his blunt nose. Breaugh, slouched back in the seat, looked sightlessly out through the passing crowds. Ditmar smoked passively, and Mario twirled and balanced a bit of paper he had rolled into a cylinder.

At three-fifteen Janniver cleared his throat. "I guess he went crazy."

Breaugh grunted. Ditmar smiled a trifle. Mario lit a cigarette, scowled.

Janniver said, "I saw him today."

Six eyes swung to him. "Where?"

"I wasn't going to mention it," said Janniver, "unless he failed to show up today. He's living at the Atlantic-Em-

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pire—a suite on the twentieth floor. I bribed the clerk and found that he's been there over a week."

Breaugh said with a wrinkled forehead, eyes black and suspicious, "How did you happen to see him there?"

"I went to check their books. It's on my route. On my way out, I saw Zaer in the lobby, big as life."

"Did he see you?"

Janniver shrugged woodenly. "Possibly. I'm not sure. He seemed rather wrapped up in a woman, an expensive-looking woman."

"Humph," said Ditmar. "Looks like Zaer's got our money's worth, all right."

Breaugh rose. "Let's go call on him, find out why he hasn't been to see us." He turned to Janniver. "Is he registered under his own name?"

Janniver nodded his long heavy head. "As big as life."

Breaugh started away, halted, looked from face to face. "You fellows coming?"

"Yes," said Mario. He rose. So did Ditmar and Janniver.

The Atlantic-Empire Hotel was massive and elegant, equipped with every known device for the feeding, bathing, comforting, amusing, flattering, relaxing, stimulating, assuaging of the men and women able to afford the price.

At the entry a white-coated flunky took the wraps of the most casual visitor, brushed him, offered the woman corsages from an iced case. The hall into the lobby was as hushed as the nave of a cathedral, lined with thirty-foot mirrors. A moving carpet took the guest into the lobby, a great hall in the Gloriana style of fifty years before. An arcade of small shops lined one wall. Here—if the guest cared little for expense—he could buy wrought copper, gold, tantalum; gowns in glowing fabrics of scarlet, purple, indigo; *objets* from ancient Tibet and the products of Novacraft; cabochons of green Jovian opals, sold by the milligram, blue balticons from Mars, fire diamonds brought from twenty miles under the surface of the Earth; Marathesti cherries preserved in Organdy Liqueur, perfumes pressed from Arctic moss, white marmorea blooms like the ghosts of beautiful women.

Another entire wall was a single glass panel, the side of the hotel's main swimming pool. Under-water shone blue-green, and there was the splash, the shining wet gold of swimming bodies. The furniture of the lobby was in shades of the same blue-green and gold, with intimacy provided by screens of vines covered with red, black and white blossoms. A golden light suffused the air, heightened the illusion of an enchanted world where people moved in a high-keyed *milieu* of expensive clothes, fabulous jewelry, elegant wit, careful lovemaking.

BREAUGH looked about with a twisted mouth. "Horrible parasites, posing and twittering and debauching each other while the rest of the world works!"

"Oh, come now," said Ditmar. "Don't be so all-fired intense. They're the only ones left who are having any fun."

"I doubt it," said Breaugh. "They're as defeated and futile as anyone else. There's no more place for them to go than there is for us."

"Have you heard of the Empyrean Tower?"

"Oh—vaguely. Some tremendous building out in Meadowlands."

"That's right. A tower three miles high. Somebody's having fun with that project. Designing it, seeing it go up, up, up."

"There's four billion people in the world," said Breaugh. "Only one Empyrean Tower."

"What kind of a world would it be without extremes?" asked Ditmar. "A place like the inside of a filing cabinet. Breathe the air here. It's rich, smells of civilization, tradition."

Mario glanced in surprise at Ditmar, the saturnine wry Ditmar, whom he would have considered the first to sneer at the foibles of the elite.

Janniver said mildly, "I enjoy coming here, myself. In a way, it's an adventure, a look into a different world."

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Breaugh snorted. "Only a millionaire can do anything more than look."

"The mass standard of living rises continuously," reflected Mario. "And almost at the same rate the number of millionaires drops. Whether we like it or not, the extremes are coming closer together. In fact, they've almost met."

"And life daily becomes more like a big bowl of rich, nourishing mush—without salt," said Ditmar. "By all means abolish poverty, but let's keep our millionaires. . . . Oh, well, we came here to find Zaer, not to argue sociology. I suppose we might as well all go together."

They crossed the lobby. The desk-clerk, a handsome silver-haired man with a grave face, bowed.

"Is Mr. Zaer in?" Ditmar asked.

"I'll call his suite, sir." A moment later: "No, sir, he doesn't answer. Shall I page him?"

"No," said Ditmar. "We'll look around a bit."

"About an hour ago I believe he crossed the lobby toward the Mauna Hiva. You might try there."

"Thanks."

The Mauna Hiva was a circular room. At its center rose a great mound of weathered rock, overgrown with palms, ferns, a tangle of exotic plants. Three cocoanut palms slanted across the island, and the whole was lit with a soft watery white light. Below was a bar built of waxed tropical woods, and beyond, at the periphery of the illumination, a ring of tables.

They found Zaer quickly. He sat with a dark-haired woman in a sheath of emerald silk. On the table in front of them moved a number of small glowing many-colored shapes—sparkling, flashing, intense as patterns cut from butterfly wings. It was a ballet, projected in three-dimensional miniature. Tiny figures leaped, danced, posed to entrancing music in a magnificent setting of broken marble columns and Appian cypress trees.

A moment the four stood back, watching in dour amusement.

Breaugh nudged Mario. "By Heaven, he acts like he's been doing it all his life!"

Ditmar advanced to the table; the girl turned her long opaque eyes up at him. Zaer glanced up blankly.

"Hello there, Zaer," said Ditmar, a sarcastic smile wreathing his lips. "Have you forgotten your old pals of the Oxonian Terrace?"

Zaer stared blankly. "I'm sorry."

"I suppose you don't know us?" asked Breaugh, looking down his long crooked nose.

ZAER pushed a hand through his mop of curly black hair. "I'm afraid you have the advantage of me, gentlemen."

"Humph," said Breaugh. "Let's get this straight. You're Pete Zaer, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

Janniver interposed, "Perhaps you'd prefer to speak with us alone?"

Zaer blinked. "Not at all. Go ahead, say it."

"Ever heard of the Chateau d'If?" inquired Breaugh acidly.

"And eight thousand dollars?" added Ditmar. "A joint investment, shall we say?"

Zaer frowned in what Mario could have sworn to be honest bewilderment.

"You believe that I owe you eight thousand dollars?"

"Either that, or eight thousand dollars' worth of information."

Zaer shrugged. "Eight thousand dollars?" He reached into his breast pocket, pulled out a bill-folo, counted. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. There you are, gentlemen. Whatever it's for, I'm sure I don't know. Maybe I was drunk." He handed eight thousand-dollar bills to the rigid Ditmar. "Anyway now you're satisfied and I hope you'll be good enough to leave." He gestured to the tiny figures, swaying, posturing, to the rapturous music. "We've already missed the Devotional Dance, the main reason we tuned it on."

"Zaer," said Mario haltingly. The gay youthful eyes swung to him.

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"Yes?"—politely.

"Is this all the report we get? After all, we acted in good faith."

Zaer stared back coldly. "You have eight thousand dollars. I don't know you from Adam's off ox. You claim it, I pay it. That's pretty good faith on my part."

Breaugh pulled at Mario's arm. "Let's go."

CHAPTER III

Blind Plunge

SOBERLY they sat a table in an unpretentious tavern, soberly drinking beer. For a while none of the four spoke. Four silent figures—tall strong Janniver, with the rough features, the Baltic hair, the African fiber, the Oriental restraint; Breaugh, the nimble-eyed, black browed and long-nosed; Ditmar, the sardonic autumn-colored man with the sick liver; Mario, normal, modest, pleasant.

Mario spoke first. "If that's what eight thousand buys at the Chateau d'If, I'll volunteer."

"If," said Breaugh shortly.

"It's not reasonable," rumbled Janniver. Among them, his emotions were probably the least disturbed, his sense of order and fitness the most outraged.

Breaugh struck the table with his fist, a light blow, but nevertheless vehement. "It's *not* reasonable! It violates logic!"

"*Your* logic," Ditmar pointed out.

Breaugh cocked his head sideways. "What's yours?"

"I haven't any."

"I maintain that the Chateau d'If is an *enterprise*," said Breaugh. "At the fee they charged, I figured it for a money-making scheme. It looks like I'm wrong. Zaer was broke a month ago. Or almost so. We gave him eight thousand dollars. He goes to the Chateau d'If, he comes out, takes a suite at the Atlantic-Empire, buys an expensive woman, shoves money at us by the fistful. The only place he could have got it is at the Chateau d'If. Now there's no profit in that kind of business."

"Some of them pay ten million dollars," said Mario softly. "That could take up some of the slack."

Ditmar drank his beer. "What now? Want to shake again?"

No one spoke. At last Breaugh said, "Frankly, I'm afraid to."

Mario raised his eyebrows. "What? with Zaer's climb to riches right in front of you?"

"Odd," mused Breaugh, "that's just what he was saying. That he was one of the meteoric school-boy wonders who hadn't meteored yet. Now he'll probably turn out to be an unsung genius."

"The Chateau still sounds good, if that's what it does for you."

"If," sneered Breaugh.

"If," assented Mario mildly.

Ditmar said with a harsh chuckle, "I've got eight thousand dollars here. Our mutual property. As far as I'm concerned, it's all yours, if you want to take on Zaer's assignment."

Breaugh and Janniver gave acquiescent shrugs.

Mario toyed with the idea. His life was idle, useless. He dabled in architecture, played handball, slept, ate. A pleasant but meaningless existence. He rose to his feet. "I'm on my way, right now. Give me the eight thousand before I change my mind."

"Here you are," said Ditmar. "Er—in spite of Zaer's example, we'll expect a report. Tuesdays and Fridays at three, on the Oxonian Terrace."

Mario waved gaily, as he pushed out the door into the late afternoon. "Tuesdays and Fridays at three. Be seeing you."

Ditmar shook his head. "I doubt it."

Breaugh compressed his mouth. "I doubt it too."

Janniver merely shook his head. . . .

Exmoor Avenue began in Lanchester, in front of the Power Bank, on the fourth level, swung north, rose briefly to the fifth level where it crossed the Continental Highway, curved back to

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the west, slanted under Grimshaw Boulevard, dropped to the surface in Meadowlands.

Mario found 5600 Exmoor to be a gray block of a building, not precisely dilapidated, but evidently unloved and uncared-for. A thin indecisive strip of lawn separated it from the road, and a walkway led to a small excrescence of a portico.

WITH the level afternoon sun shining full on his back, Mario walked to the portico, pressed the button.

A moment passed, then the door slid aside, revealing a short hall. "Please come in," said the soft voice of a commercial welcome-box.

Mario advanced down the hall, aware that radiation was scanning his body for metal or weapons. The hall opened into a green and brown reception room, furnished with a leather settee, a desk, a painting of three slim wide-eyed nudes against a background of a dark forest. A door flicked back, a young woman entered.

Mario tightened his mouth. It was an adventure to look at the girl. She was amazingly beautiful, with a beauty that grew more poignant the longer he considered it. She was slight, small-boned. Her eyes were cool, direct, her jaw and chin fine and firm. She was beautiful in herself, without ornament, ruse or adornment; beautiful almost in spite of herself, as if she regretted the magic of her face. Mario felt cool detachment in her gaze, an impersonal unfriendliness. Human perversity immediately aroused in his brain a desire to shatter the indifference, to arouse passion of one sort or another. . . . He smothered the impulse. He was here on business.

"Your name, please?" Her voice was soft, with a fine grain to it, like precious wood, and pitched in a strange key.

"Roland Mario."

She wrote on a form. "Age?"

"Twenty-nine."

"Occupation?"

"Architect."

"What do you want here?"

"This is the Chateau d'If?"

"Yes." She waited, expectantly.

"I'm a customer."

"Who sent you?"

"No one. I'm a friend of Pete Zaer's. He was here a couple of weeks ago."

She nodded, wrote.

"He seems to have done pretty well for himself," observed Mario cheerfully.

She said nothing until she had finished writing. Then: "This is a business, operated for profit. We are interested in money. How much do you have to spend?"

"I'd like to know what you have to sell."

"Adventure." She said the word without accent or emphasis.

"Ah," said Mario. "I see. . . . Out of curiosity, how does working here affect you? Do you find it an adventure, or are you bored too?"

She shot him a quick glance. "We offer two classes of service. The first we value at ten million dollars. It is cheap at that price, but it is the dullest and least stirring of the two—the situation over which you have some control. The second we value at ten thousand dollars, and this produces the most extreme emotions with the minimum of immediate control on your part."

Mario considered the word "immediate." He asked, "Have you been through the treatment?"

Again the cool flick of a glance. "Would you care to indicate how much you wish to spend?"

"I asked you a question," said Mario.

"You will receive further information inside."

"Are you human?" asked Mario. "Do you breathe?"

"Would you care to indicate how much you have to spend?"

Mario shrugged. "I have eight thousand dollars with me" He pursed his lips. "And I'll give you a thousand to stick your tongue out at me."

She dropped the form into a slot, arose. "Follow me, please."

SHE led him through the door, along a hall, into a small room, bare and stark, lit by a single cone-shaped floor-

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lamp turned against the ceiling, a room painted white, gray, green. A man sat at a desk punching a calculator. Behind him stood a filing cabinet. There was a faint odor in the air, like mingled mint, gardenias, with a hint of an antiseptic, medicinal scent.

The man looked up, rose to his feet, bowed his head politely. He was young, blond as beach-sand, as magnificently handsome as the girl was beautiful. Mario felt a slight edge form in his brain. One at a time they were admirable, their beauty seemed natural. Together, the beauty cloyed, as if it were something owned and valued highly. It seemed self-conscious and vulgar. And Mario suddenly felt a quiet pride in his own commonplace person.

The man was taller than Mario by several inches. His chest was smooth and wide corded with powerful sinew. In spite of almost over-careful courtesy, he gave an impression of over-powering, over-riding confidence.

"Mr. Roland Mario," said the girl. She added drily, "He's got eight thousand dollars."

The young man nodded gravely, reached out his hand. "My name is Mervyn Allen." He looked at the girl. "Is that all, Thane?"

"That's all for tonight." She left.

"Can't keep going on eight thousand a night," grumbled Mervyn Allen. "Sit down, Mr. Mario."

Mario took a seat. "The adventure business must have tremendous expenses," he observed with a tight grin.

"Oh, no," said Allen with wide candid eyes. "To the contrary. The operators have a tremendous avarice. We try to average twenty-million a day profit. Occasionally we can't make it."

"Pardon me for annoying you with carfare," said Mario. "If you don't want it, I'll keep it."

Allen made a magnanimous gesture. "As you please."

Mario said, "The receptionist told me that ten million buys the dullest of your services, and ten thousand something fairly wild. What do I get for nothing? Vivisection?"

Allen smiled. "No. You're entirely safe with us. That is to say, you suffer no physical pain, you emerge alive."

"But you won't give me any particulars? After all, I have a fastidious nature. What you'd consider a good joke might annoy me very much."

Mervyn Allen shrugged blandly. "You haven't spent any money yet. You can still leave."

Mario rubbed the arms of his chair with the palms of his hand. "That's rather unfair. I'm interested, but also I'd like to know something of what—I'm getting into."

Allen nodded. "Understandable. You're willing to take a chance, but you're not a complete fool. Is that it?"

"Exactly."

Allen straightened a pencil on his desk. "First, I'd like to give you a short psychiatric and medical examination. You understand," and he flashed Mario a bright candid glance, "we don't want any accidents at the Chateau d'If."

"Go ahead," said Mario.

Allen slid open the top of his desk, handed Mario a cap of crinkling plastic in which tiny wires glittered. "Encephalograph pick-up. Please fit it snugly."

Mario grinned. "Call it a lie-detector."

Allen smiled briefly. "A lie-detector, then."

Mario muttered, "I'd like to put it on you."

Allen ignored him, pulled out a pad of printed forms, adjusted a dial in front of him.

"Name?"

"Roland Mario."

"Age?"

"Twenty-eight."

ALLEN stared at the dial, frowned, looked up questioningly.

"I wanted to see if it worked," said Mario. "I'm twenty-nine."

"It works," said Allen shortly. "Occupation?"

"Architect. At least I dabble at it, design dog-houses and rabbit hutches for my friends. Although I did the

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Geraf Fleeter Corporation plant in Hanover a year or so ago, pretty big job."

"*Hm.* Where were you born?"

"Buenos Aires."

"Ever hold any government jobs? Civil Service? Police? Administrative? ACP?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Red tape. Disgusting bureaucrats."

"Nearest relative?"

"My brother, Arthur Mario. In Callao. Coffee business."

"No wife?"

"No wife."

"Approximate worth? Wealth, possessions, real estate?"

"Oh—sixty, seventy thousand. Modestly comfortable. Enough so that I can loaf all I care to."

"Why did you come to the Chateau d'If?"

"Same reason that everybody else comes. Boredom. Repressed energy. Lack of something to fight against."

Allen laughed. "So you think you'll work off some of that energy fighting the Chateau d'If?"

Mario smiled faintly. "It's a challenge."

"We've got a good thing here," Allen confided. "A wonder it hasn't been done before."

"Perhaps you're right. How did you happen to come to the Chateau d'If?"

"Five of us rolled dice. A man named Pete Zaer lost. He came, but he wouldn't speak to us afterwards."

Allen nodded sagely. "We've got to ask that our customers keep our secrets. If there were no mystery, we would have no customers."

"It had better be good," said Mario, "after all the build-up." And he thought he saw a flicker of humor in Allen's eyes.

"It's cheap at ten million."

"And quite dear at ten thousand?" suggested Mario.

Allen leaned back in his chair, and his beautiful face was cold as a marble mask. Mario suddenly thought of the girl in the front office. The same expression of untouchable distance and height. He said, "I suppose you have the same argument with everyone who comes in."

"Identically."

"Well, where do we go from here?"

"Are you healthy? Any organic defects?"

"None."

"Very well. I'll wave the physical."

Mario reached up, removed the encephelograph pick-up. "Now I can lie again."

Allen drummed a moment on the table-top, reached forward, tossed the mesh back in the desk, scribbled on a sheet of paper, tossed it to Mario. "A contract relieving us of responsibility."

Mario read: In consideration of services rendered, Roland Mario agreed that the Chateau d'If and its principals would not be held responsible for any injuries, physical or psychological, which he might sustain while on the premises, or as a result of his presence on the premises. Furthermore, he waived all rights to prosecute. Any and all transactions, treatments, experiments, events which occurred on, by or to his person were by his permission and express direction.

Mario chewed doubtfully at his lip. "This sounds pretty tough. About all you can't do is kill me."

"Correct," said Allen.

"A very ominous contract."

"Perhaps just the talk is adventure enough," suggested Allen, faintly contemptuous.

MARIO pursed his lips. "I like pleasant adventures. A nightmare is an adventure, and I don't like nightmares."

"Who does?"

"In other words, you won't tell me a thing?"

"Not a thing."

"If I had any sense," said Mario, "I'd get up and walk out."

"Suit yourself."

"What do you do with all the money?"

Mervyn Allen relaxed in his chair, put his hands behind his blond head.

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"We're building the Empyrean Tower. That's no secret."

It was news to Mario. The Empyrean Tower—the vastest, grandest, heaviest, tallest, most noble structure created or even conceived by man. A sky-piercing star-aspiring shaft three miles tall.

"Why, if I may ask, are you building the Empyrean Tower?"

Allen sighed. "For the same reason you're here, at the Chateau d'If. Boredom. And don't tell me to take my own treatment."

"Have you?"

Allen studied him with narrow eyes. "Yes. I have. You ask lots of questions. Too many. Here's the contract. Sign it or tear it up. I can't give you any more time."

"First," said Mario patiently, "you'll have to give me some idea what I'm getting in to."

"It's not crime," said Allen. "Let's say—we give you a new outlook on life."

"Artificial amnesia?" asked Mario, remembering Zaer.

"No. Your memory is intact. Here it is," and Allen thrust out the contract. "Sign it or tear it up."

Mario signed. "I realize I'm a fool. Want my eight thousand?"

"We're in the business for money," said Allen shortly. "If you can spare it."

Mario counted out the eight thousand-dollar bills. "There you are."

Allen took the money, tapped it on the table, inspected Mario ruminatively. "Our customers fall pretty uniformly into three groups. Reckless young men just out of adolescence, jaded old men in search of new kinds of vice, and police snoopers. You don't seem to fit."

Mario said with a shrug, "Average the first two. I'm reckless, jaded and twenty-nine."

Allen smiled briefly, politely, rose to his feet. "This way please."

A panel opened behind him, revealing a chamber lit with cool straw-colored light. Green plants, waist-high, grew in profusion—large-leafed exotics, fragile ferns, fantastic spired fungi, nodding spear-blades the color of Aztec jade. Mario noticed Allen drawing a deep breath before entering the room, but thought nothing of it. He followed, gazing right and left in admiration for the small artificial jungles to either side. The air was strong with the mint-gardenia-antiseptic odor—pungent. He blinked. His eyes watered, blurred. He halted, swaying. Allen turned around, watched with a cool half-smile, as if this was a spectacle he knew well but found constantly amusing.

Vision retreated; hearing hummed, flagged, departed; time swam, spun. . . .

CHAPTER IV

A New Life

MARIO awoke.

It was a sharp clean-cut awakening, not the slow wading through a morass of drug.

He sat on a bench in Tanagra Square, under the big mimosa, and the copper peacocks were pecking at bread he held out to them.

He looked at his hand. It was a fat pudgy hand. The arm was encased in hard gray fiber. No suit he owned was gray. The arm was short. His legs were short. His belly was large. He licked his lips. They were pulpy, thick.

He was Roland Mario inside the brain, the body was somebody else. He sat quite still.

The peacocks pecked at the bread. He threw it away. His arm was stiff, strangely heavy. He had flabby muscles. He rose to his feet grunting. His body was soft but not flexible. He rubbed his hand over his face, felt a short lumpy nose, long ears, heavy cheeks like pans full of cold glue. He was bald as the underside of a fish.

Who was the body? He blinked, felt his mind twisting, tugging at its restraint. Mario fought to steady himself, as a man in a teteering canoe tries to hold it steady, to prevent capsizing into dark water. He leaned against the trunk of the mimosa tree. Steady, steady,

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focus your eyes! What had been done to him no doubt could be undone. Or it would wear off. Was it a dream, an itensely vivid segment of narcotiana? Adventure—ha! That was a mild word.

He fumbled into his pockets, found a folded sheet of paper. He opened it, sat down while he read the typescript. First there was a heavy warning:

MEMORIZE THE FOLLOWING, AS THIS PAPER WILL DISINTEGRATE IN APPROXIMATELY FIVE MINUTES!

You are embarking on the life you paid for. Your name is Ralston Ebery. Your age is 56. You are married to Florence Ebery, age 50. Your home address is 19 Seafoam Place. You have three children: Luther, age 25, Ralston Jr., age 23, Clydia, age 19.

You are a wealthy manufacturer of aircraft, the Ebery Air-car. Your bank is the African Federal; the pass-book is in your pocket. When you sign your name, do not consciously guide your hand; let the involuntary muscles write the signature Ralston Ebery.

If you dislike your present form, you may return to the Chateau d'If. Ten thousand dollars will buy you a body of our choice, ten million dollars will buy you a young healthy body to your own specifications.

Please do not communicate with the police. In the first place, they will believe you to be insane. In the second place, if they successfully hampered the operation of the Chateau d'If, you would be marooned in the body of Ralston Ebery, a prospect you may or may not enjoy. In the third place, the body of Roland Mario will insist on his legal identity.

With your business opportunities, ten million dollars is a sum well within your reach. When you have it return to the Chateau d'If for a young and healthy body.

We have fulfilled our bargain with you. We have given you adventure. With skill and ingenuity, you will be able to join the group of men without age, eternally young."

Mario read the sheet a second time. As he finished, it crumbled into dust in his hands. He leaned back, aware of nausea rising in him like an elevator in a shaft. The most hateful of intimacies, dwelling in another man's body—especially one so gross and untidy. He felt a sensation of hunger, and with perverse malice decided to let Ralston Ebery's body go hungry.

Ralston Ebery! The name was vaguely familiar. Did Ralston Ebery now possess Mario's own body? Possibly. Not necessarily. Mario had no conception of the principle involved in the transfer. There seemed to be no incision, no brain graft.

Now what?

He could report to the ACP. But, if he could make them believe him, there still would be no legal recourse. To the best of his knowledge, no one at the Chateau d'If had performed a criminal act upon him. There was not even a good case of battery, since he had waived his right to prosecute.

The newspapers, the telescreens? Suppose unpleasant publicity were able to force the Chateau d'If out of business, what then? Mervyn Allen could set up a similar business elsewhere—and Mario would never be allowed to return to his own body.

He could follow the suggestion of the now disintegrated paper. No doubt Ralston Ebery had powerful political and financial connections, as well as great wealth in his own right. Or had he? Would it not be more likely that Ebery had liquidated as much of his wealth as possible, both to pay ten million dollars to the Chateau d'If, and also to provide his new body with financial backing.

Mario contemplated the use of force. There might be some means to compel the return of his body. Help would be useful. Should he report to Ditmar, Janniver, Breaugh? Indeed, he owed them some sort of explanation.

He rose to his feet. Mervyn Allen would not conceivably leave vulnerable areas in his defenses. He must realize that violence, revenge, would be the first idea in a mind shanghaied into an old sick body. There would be precautions against obvious violence, of that he was certain.

The ideas thronged, swirled, frothed, like different-colored paints stirred in a bucket. His head became light, a buzzing sounded in his ears. A dream, when would he awake? He gasped, panted, made feeble struggling motions. A patrolman stopped beside him, tripped his incident-camera automatically.

"What's wrong, sir? Taken sick?"

"No, no," said Mario. "I'm all right. Just dozed off."

He rose to his feet, stepped on the Choreops Strip, passed the central fountain flagged with aventurine quartz,

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stepped off at the Malabar Pavilion, wandered under the great bay trees out onto Kesselyn Avenue. Slowly, heavily, he plodded through the wholesale florist shops, and at Pacific, let the escalator take him to the third level, where he stepped on the fast pedestrip of the Grand Footway to the Concourse.

His progress had been unconscious, automatic, as if his body made the turns at their own violition. Now at the foot of the Aetherian Block he stepped off the strip, breathing a little heavily. The body of Ralston Ebery was spongy, in poor condition. And Mario felt an unholy gloating as he thought of Ralston Ebery's body sweating, puffing, panting, fasting—working off its lard.

A face suddenly thrust into his, a snarling hate-brimmed face. Teeth showed, the pupils of the eyes were like the black-tipped poison darts of the Mazumbwe Backlands. The face was that of a young-old man—unlined, but gray-haired; innocent but wise, distorted by the inner thrash and coil of his hate. Through tight teeth and corded jaw muscles the young-old man snarled:

"You filthy misbegotten dung-thief, do you hope to live? You venom, you stench. It would soil me to kill you. But I shall!"

Mario stepped back. The man was a stranger. "I'm sorry. You must be mistaken," he said, before it dawned that Ralston Ebery's deeds were now accountable to him.

A hand fell on the young-old man's shoulder. "Beat it, Arnold!" said a hard voice. "Be off with you!" The young-old man fell back.

Mario's rescuer turned round—a dapper young man with an agile fox-face. He nodded respectfully. "Good morning, Mr. Ebery. Sorry that crank bothered you."

"Good morning," said Mario. "Ah—who was he?"

The young man eyed him curiously. "Why, that's Letya Arnold. Used to work for us. You fired him."

Mario was puzzled. "Why?"

The young man blinked. "I'm sure I don't know. Inefficiency, I suppose."

"It's not important," said Mario hurriedly. "Forget it."

"Sure. Of course. On your way up to the office?"

"Yes, I—I suppose so." Who was this young man? It was a problem he would be called on to face many times, he thought.

THEY approached the elevators. "After you," said Mario. There was such an infinity of detail to be learned, a thousand personal adjustments, the intricate pattern of Ralston Ebery's business. Was there any business left? Ebery certainly would have plundered it of every cent he could endow his new body with. Ebery Air-car was a large concern; still the extracting of even ten million dollars was bound to make a dent. And this young man with the clever face, who was he? Mario decided to try indirectness, a vague question.

"Now let's see—how long since you've been promoted?"

The young man darted a swift side-glance, evidently wondering whether Ebery was off his feed. "Why, I've been assistant office manager for two years."

Mario nodded. They stepped into the elevator, and the young man was quick to press the button. Obsequious cur! thought Mario. The door snapped shut, and there came the swoop which stomachs of the age had become inured to. The elevator halted, the doors flung back, they stepped out into a busy office, filled with clicking machinery, clerks, banks of telescreens. Clatter, hum—and sudden silence with every eye on the body of Ralston Ebery. Furtive glances, studied attentiveness to work, exaggerated efficiency.

Mario halted, looked the room over. It was his. By default. No one in the world could deny him authority over this concern, unless Ralston Ebery had been too fast, too greedy, raising his ten million plus. If Ralston Ebery had embezzled or swindled, he—Roland Mario in Ebery's body—would be punished. Mario was trapped in Ebery's past. Ebery's shortcomings would be

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held against him, the hate he had aroused would inflict itself on him, he had inherited Ebery's wife, his family, his mistress, if any.

A short middle-aged man with wide disillusioned eyes, the bitter clasp of mouth that told of many hopes lost or abandoned, approached.

"Morning, Mr. Ebery. Glad you're here. Several matters for your personal attention."

Mario looked sharply at the man. Was that overtone in his voice sarcasm? "In my office," said Mario. The short man turned toward a hallway. Mario followed. "Come along," he said to the assistant office manager.

Gothic letters wrought from silver spelled out Ralston Ebery's name on a door. Mario put his thumb into the lock; the prints meshed, the door slid aside; Mario slowly entered, frowning in distaste at the fussy *decor*. Ralston Ebery had been a lover of the rococo. He sat down behind the desk of polished black metal, said to the assistant office manager, "Bring me the personnel file on the office staff—records, photographs."

"Yes, sir."

The short man hauled a chair forward. "Now, Mr. Ebery, I'm sorry to say that I consider you've put the business in an ambiguous position."

"What do you mean?" asked Mario frostily, as if he were Ebery himself.

The short man snorted. "What do I mean? I mean that the contracts you sold to Atlas Airboat were the biggest money-makers Ebery Air-car had. As you know very well. We took a terrible drubbing in that deal." The short man jumped to his feet, walked up and down. "Frankly, Mr. Ebery, I don't understand it."

"Just a minute," said Mario. "Let me look at the mail." Killing time, he thumbed through the mail until the assistant office manager returned with a file of cards.

"Thank you," said Mario. "That's all for now."

He flicked through them, glancing at the pictures. This short man had authority, he should be somewhere near the top. Here he was—Louis Correaos, Executive Adviser. Information as to salary, family, age, background—more than he could digest at the moment. He put the file to one side. Louis Correaos was still pacing up and down, fuming.

CORREAOS paused, darted Mario a venomous stare. "Ill-advised? I think you're crazy!" He shrugged. "I tell you this because my job means nothing to me. The company can't stand the beating you've given it. Not the way you want it run, at any rate. You insist on marketing a flying tea-wagon, festooned with ornaments; then you sell the only profitable contracts, the only features to the ship that make it at all airworthy."

Mario reflected a minute. Then he said, "I had my reasons."

Correaos, halting in his pacing, stared again.

Mario said, "Can you conjecture how I plan to profit from these circumstances?"

Correaos' eyes were like poker-chips; his mouth contracted, tightened, pursed to an O. He was thinking. After a moment he said, "You sold our steel plant to Jones and Cahill, our patent on the ride stabilizer to Bluecraft." He gazed narrowly sidewise at Mario. "It sounds like you're doing what you swore you'd never do. Bring out a new model that would fly."

"How do you like the idea?" asked Mario, looking wise.

Louis Correaos stammered, "Why, Mr. Ebery, this is—fantastic! You asking *me* what *I* think! I'm your yes-man. That's what you're paying me for. I know it, you know it, everybody knows it."

"You haven't been yessing me today," said Ebery. "You told me I was crazy."

"Well," stammered Correaos, "I didn't see your idea. It's what I'd like to have done long ago. Put in a new transformer, pull off all that ormolu, use plancheen instead of steel, simplify, simplify—"

"Louis," said Mario, "make the an-

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nouncement. Start the works rolling. You're in charge. I'll back up anything you want done."

Louis Correaos' face was a drained mask.

"Make your salary anything you want," said Mario. "I've got some new projects I'm going to be busy on. I want you to run the business. You're the boss. Can you handle it?"

"Yes. I can."

"Do it your own way. Bring out a new model that'll beat everything in the field. I'll check on the final set-up, but until then, you're the boss. Right now—clean up all this detail." He pointed to the file of correspondence. "Take it to your office."

Correaos impulsively rushed up, shook Mario's hand. "I'll do the best I can." He left the room.

Mario said into the communicator, "Get me the African Federal Bank. . . . Hello—" to the girl's face on the screen. "—this is Ralston Ebery. Please check on my personal balance."

After a moment she said, "It's down to twelve hundred dollars, Mr. Ebery. Your last withdrawal almost wiped out your balance."

"Thank you," said Mario. He settled the thick body of Ralston Ebery into the chair, and became aware of a great cavernous growling in his abdomen. Ralston Ebery was hungry.

Mario grinned a ghastly sour grin. He called food service. "Send up a chopped olive sandwich, celery, a glass of skim milk."

CHAPTER V

An Understanding

DURING the afternoon he became aware of an ordeal he could no longer ignore: acquainting himself with Ralston Ebery's family, his home life. It could not be a happy one. No happy husband and father would leave his wife and children at the mercy of a stranger. It was the act of hate, rather than love.

A group photograph stood on the desk—a picture inconspicuously placed, as if it were there on sufference. This was his family. Florence Ebery was a frail woman, filmy, timid, over-dressed, and her face peering out from under a preposterous hat, wore the patient perplexed expression of a family pet dressed in doll clothes—somehow pathetic.

Luther and Ralston Jr. were stocky young men with set mulish faces, Clydia a full-cheeked creature with a petulant mouth.

At three o'clock Mario finally summoned up his courage, called Ebery's home on the screen, had Florence Ebery put on. She said in a thin distant voice, "Yes, Ralston?"

"I'll be home this evening, dear." Mario added the last word with conscious effort.

She wrinkled her nose, pursed her lips and her eyes shone as if she were about to cry. "You don't even tell me where you've been."

Mario said, "Florence—frankly. Would you say I've been a good husband?"

She blinked defiantly at him. "I've no complaints. I've never complained." The pitch of her voice hinted that this perhaps was not literally true. Probably had reason, thought Mario.

"No, I want the truth, Florence."

"You've given me all the money I wanted. You've humiliated me a thousand times—snubbed me, made me a laughing stock for the children."

Mario said, "Well, I'm sorry, Florence." He could not vow affection. He felt sorry for Florence—Ebery's wife—but she was Ralston Ebery's wife, not his own. One of Ralston Ebery's victims. "See you this evening," he said lamely, and switched off.

He sat back. Think, think, think. There must be a way out. Or was this to be his life, his end, in this corpulent unhealthy body? Mario laughed suddenly. If ten million dollars bought Ralston Ebery a new body—presumably his own—then ten million more of Ral-

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ston Ebery's dollars might buy the body back. For money spoke a clear loud language to Mervyn Allen. Humiliating, a nauseous obsequious act, a kissing of the foot which kicked you, a submission, an acquiescence—but it was either this or wear the form of Ralston Ebery.

Mario stood up, walked to the window, stepped out on the landing plat, signaled down an aircab.

Ten minutes later he stood at 5600 Exmoor Avenue in Meadowlands, the Chateau d'If. A gardener clipping the hedges eyed him with distrust. He strode up the driveway, pressed the button.

There was, as before, a short wait, the unseen scrutiny of spy cells. The sun shone warm on his back, to his ears came the *shirrrrr* of the gardener's clippers.

The door opened.

"Please come in," said the soft commercial voice.

Down the hall, into the green and brown reception room with the painting of the three stark nudes before the olden forest.

The girl of fabulous beauty entered; Mario gazed again into the wide clear eyes which led to some strange brain. *Whose* brain? Mario wondered. Of man or woman?

No longer did Mario feel the urge to excite her, arouse her. She was unnatural, a *thing*.

"What do you wish?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Allen."

"On what business?"

"Ah, you know me?"

"On what business?"

"You're a money-making concern, are you not?"

"Yes."

"My business means money."

"Please be seated." She turned, Mario watched the slim body in retreat. She walked lightly, gracefully, in low elastic slippers. He became aware of Ebert's body. The old goat's glands were active enough. Mario fought down the wincing nausea.

The girl returned. "Follow me, please."

MERVYN Allen received him with affability, though not going so far as to shake hands.

"Hello, Mr. Mario. I rather expected you. Sit down. How's everything going? Enjoying yourself?"

"Not particularly. I'll agree that you've provided me with a very stimulating adventure. And indeed—now that I think back—nowhere have you made false representations."

Allen smiled a cool brief smile. And Mario wondered whose brain this beautiful body surrounded.

"Your attitude is unusually philosophical," said Allen. "Most of our customers do not realize that we give them exactly what they pay for. The essence of adventure is surprise, danger, and an outcome dependent upon one's own efforts."

"No question," remarked Mario, "that is precisely what you offer. But don't mistake me. If I pretended friendship, I would not be sincere. In spite of any rational processes, I feel a strong resentment. I would kill you without sorrow—even though, as you will point out, I brought the whole matter on myself."

"Exactly."

"Aside from my own feelings, we have a certain community of interests, which I wish to exploit. You want money, I want my own body. I came to inquire by what circumstances our desires could both be satisfied."

Allen's face was joyous, he laughed delightedly. "Mario, you amuse me. I've heard many propositions, but none quite so formal, so elegant. Yes, I want money. You want the body you have become accustomed to. I'm sorry to say that your old body is now the property of someone else, and I doubt if he'd be persuaded to surrender it. But—I can sell you another body, healthy, handsome, young, for our usual fee. Ten million dollars. For thirty million I'll give you the widest possible choice—a body like mine, for instance. The Empyrean Tower is an exceedingly expensive project."

Mario said, "Out of curiosity, how is this transfer accomplished? I don't no-

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tice any scar or any sign of brain graft. Which in any event is probably impossible."

Mervyn Allen nodded. "It would be tedious, splicing several million sets of nerves. Are you acquainted with the physiology of the brain?"

"No," said Mario. "It's complicated, that's about all I know of it—or have cared to know."

Allen leaned back, relaxed, spoke rapidly, as if by rote. "The brain is divided into three parts, the medulla obongata, the cerebellum—these two control involuntary motions and reflexes—and the cerebrum, the seat of memory, intelligence, personality. Thinking is done in the brain the same way thinking is done in mechanical brains, by the selection of a route through relays or neurons.

"In a blank brain, the relative ease of any circuit is the same, and the electric potential of each and every cell is the same.

"The process is divided into a series of steps—discovered, I may add, accidentally during a program of research in a completely different field. First, the patient's scalp is imbedded in a cellule of what the original research team called golasma—an organic crystal with a large number of peripheral fibers. Between the golasma cellule and the brain are a number of layers—hair, dermal tissue, bone, three separate membranes, as well as a mesh of blood-vessels, very complicated. The neural cells however are unique in their high electric potential, and for practical purposes the intervening cells do not intrude.

"Next, by a complicated scanning process, we duplicate the synapses of the brain in the golasma, relating it by a pattern of sensory stimuli to a frame that will be common to all men.

"Third, the golasma cellules are changed, the process is reversed, A's brain is equipped with B's synapses, B with A's. The total process requires only a few minutes. Non-surgical, painless, harmless. A receives B's personality and memories, B takes on A's."

SLOWLY Mario rubbed his fat chin. "You mean, I—I—am not Roland Mario at all? That thinking Roland Mario's thoughts is an illusion? And not a cell in this body is Roland Mario?"

"Not the faintest breath. You're all—let me see. Your name is Ralston Ebery, I believe. Every last corpuscle of you is Ralston Ebery. You *are* Ralston Ebery, equipped with Roland Mario's memories."

"But, my glandular make-up? Won't it modify Roland Mario's personality? After all, a man's actions are not due to his brain alone, but to a synthesis of effects."

"Very true," said Allen. "The effect is progressive. You will gradually change, become like the Ralston Ebery before the change. And the same with Roland Mario's body. The total change will be determined by the environment against heredity ratio in your characters."

Mario smiled. "I want to get out of this body soon. What I see of Ebery I don't like."

"Bring in ten million dollars," said Mervyn Allen. "The Chateau d'If exists for one purpose—to make money."

Mario inspected Allen carefully, noted the hard clear flesh, the beautiful shape of the face, skull, expression.

"What do you *need* all that money for? Why build an Empyrean Tower in the first place?"

"I do it for fun. It amuses me. I am bored. I have explored many bodies, many existences. This body is my fourteenth. I've wielded power. I do not care for the sensation. The pressure annoys me. Nor am I at all psychotic. I am not even ruthless. In my business, what one man loses, another man gains. The balance is even."

"But it's robbery!" protested Mario bitterly. "Stealing the years off one man's life to add to another's."

Allen shrugged. "The bodies are living the same cumulative length of time. The total effect is the same. There's no change but the shifting of memory. In any event, perhaps I am, in the jargon of metaphysics, a sollipsist. So far as I can see—through my eyes, through my

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brain—*I* am the only true individual, the sole conscious intellect." His eyes shadowed. "How else can it be that I—I—have been chosen from among so many to lead this charmed life of mine?"

"Pooh!" sneered Mario.

"Every man amuses himself as best he knows how. My current interest is building the Empyrean Tower." His voice took on a deep exalted ring. "It shall rise three miles into the air! There is a banquet hall with a floor of alternate silver and copper strips, a quarter mile wide, a quarter mile high, ringed with eight glass balconies. There will be garden terraces like nothing else on earth, with fountains, waterfalls, running brooks. One floor will be a fairyland out of the ancient days, peopled with beautiful nymphs.

"Others will display the earth at stages in its history. There will be museums, conservatories of various musical styles, studios, workshops, laboratories for every known type of research, sections given to retail shops. There will be beautiful chambers and balconies designed for nothing except to be wandered through, sections devoted to the—let us say, worship of Astarte. There will be halls full of toys, a hundred restaurants staffed by gourmets, a thousand taverns serving liquid dreams; halls for seeing, hearing, resting."

Said Mario, "And after you tire of the Empyrean Tower?"

Mervyn Allen flung himself back in the seat. "Ah, Mario, you touch me on a sore point. Doubtless something will suggest itself. If only we could break away from Earth, could fly past the barren rocks of the planets, to other stars, other life. There would be no need for any Chateau d'If."

Mario rubbed his fat jowl, eyed Allen quizzically. "Did you invent this process yourself?"

"I and four others who comprised a research team. They are all dead. I alone know the technique."

"And your secretary? Is she one of your changelings?"

"No," said Mervyn Allen. "Thane is what she is. She lives by hate. You think I am her lover? No," and he smiled faintly. "Not in any way. Her will is for destruction, death. A bright thing only on the surface. Inwardly she is as dark and violent as a drop of hot oil."

MARIO had absorbed too many facts, too much information. He was past speculating. "Well, I won't take any more of your time. I wanted to find out where I stand."

"Now you know. I need money. This is the easiest way to get it in large quantities that I know of. But I also have my big premium offer—bank night, bingo, whatever you wish to call it."

"What's that?"

"I need customers. The more customers, the more money. Naturally my publicity cannot be too exact. So I offer a free shift, a free body if you bring in six new customers."

Mario narrowed his eyes. "So—Sutlow gets credit for Zaer and me?"

Allen looked blank. "Who's Sutlow?"

"You don't know Sutlow?"

"Never heard of him."

"How about Ditmar?"

"Ah, he's successful, is Ditmar. Ten thousand bought him a body with advanced cirrhosis. Two more customers and he escapes. But perhaps I talk too much. I can give you no more time, Mario. Good night."

On his way out, Mario stopped in the reception room, looked down into the face of Thane. She stared back, a face like stone, eyes like star sapphires. Mario suddenly felt exalted, mystic, as if he walked on live thought, knew the power of insight.

"Your beautiful but you're cold as the sea-bed."

"This door will take you out, sir."

"Your beauty is so new and so fragile a thing—a surface only a millimeter thick. Two strokes of a knife would make you a horrible sight, one from which people would look aside as you pass."

She opened her mouth, closed it, rose to her feet, said, "This way out, sir."

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Mario reached, caught sight of Ralston Ebery's fat flaccid fingers, grimaced, pulled back his hands. "I could not touch you—with these hands."

"Nor with any others," she said from the cool distance of her existence.

He passed her to the door. "If you see the most beautiful creature that could possibly exist, if she has a soul like rock crystal, if she challenges you to take her, break her, and you are lost in a fat hideous porridge of a body—"

Her expression shifted a trifle, in which direction he could not tell. "This is the Chateau d-If," she said. "And you *are* a fat hideous porridge."

He wordlessly departed. She slid the door shut. Mario shrugged, but Ralston Ebery's face burnt in a hot glow of humiliation. There was no love, no thought of love. Nothing more than the challenge, much like the dare of a mountain to the climbers who scale its height, plunder the secrets of its slopes, master the crest. Thane, cold as the far side of the moon!

Get away, said Mario's brain sharply, break clear of the obsession. Fluff, female bodies, forget them. Is not the tangle of enough complexity?

CHAPTER VI

Leverage

FROM the door of the Chateau d'If Mario took an aircab to 19 Seafoam Place—a monster house of pink marble, effulgent, voluted, elaborate as the rest of Ralston Ebery's possessions. He thumbed the lock-hole. The p r i n t s meshed with identification patterns, the door snapped back. Mario entered.

The photograph had prepared him for his family. Florence Ebery greeted him with furtive suspicion; the sons were blank, passively hostile. The daughter seemed to have no emotions whatever, other than a constant air of puzzled surprise.

At dinner, Mario outraged Ebery's body by eating nothing but a salad of lettuce, carrots and vinegar. His family was puzzled.

"Are you feeling well, Ralston?" inquired his wife.

"Very well."

"You're not eating."

"I'm dieting. I'm going to take the lard off this hideous body."

Eight eyes bulged, four sets of knives and forks froze.

Mario went on placidly, "We're going to have some changes around here. Too much easy living is bad for a person." He addressed himself to the two young men, both alike with white faces, doughy cheeks, full lips. "You lads now —I don't want to be hard on you. After all, it's not your fault you were born Ralston Ebery's sons. But do you know what it means to earn a living by sweating for it?"

Luther, the eldest, spoke with dignity. "We work with the sweat of our brains."

"Tell me more about it," said Mario.

Luther's eyes showed anger. "I put out more work in one week than you do all year."

"Where?"

"Where? Why, in the glass yard. Where else?" There was fire here, more than Mario had expected.

Ralston Jr. said in a gruff surly voice, "We're paying you our board and room, we don't owe you a red cent. If you don't like the arrangements the way they are, we'll leave."

Mario winced. He had misjudged Ebery's sons. White faces, doughy cheeks, did not necessarily mean white doughy spirits. Better keep his opinions to himself, base his conversation on known fact. He said mildly, "Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. Forget the board and room. Spend it on something useful."

He glanced skeptically toward Clydia, Ebery's daughter. She half-simpered. Better keep his mouth shut. She might turn out to be a twelve-hour-a-day social service worker.

Nevertheless, Mario found himself

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oppressed in Ebery's house. Though living in Ebery's body, the feel of his clothes, his intimate equipment was profoundly disturbing. He could not bring himself to use Ebery's razor or toothbrush. Attending to the needs of Ebery's body was most exquisitely distasteful. He discovered to his relief that his bedroom was separate from that of Florence Ebery.

He arose the next morning very early, scarcely after dawn, hurriedly left the house, breakfasted on orange juice and dry toast at a small restaurant. Ebery's stomach protested the meager rations with angry rumbling. Ebery's legs complained when Mario decided to walk the pedestrip instead of calling down an aircab.

He let himself into the deserted offices of Ebery Air-car, wandered absently back and forth the length of the suite, thinking. Still thinking, he let himself into his private office. The clutter, the rococo junk annoyed him. He called up a janitor, waved his hand around the room. "Clear out all this fancy stuff. Take it home, keep it. If you don't want it, throw it away. Leave me the desk, a couple of chairs. The rest—out!"

He sat back, thinking. Ways, means. What weapons could he use?

He drew marks on a sheet of paper. How could he attack?

PERHAPS the law could assist him—somehow. Perhaps the ACP. But what statute did Mervyn Allen violate? There were no precedents. The Chateau d'If sold adventure. If a customer bought a great deal more than he had bargained for, he had only himself to blame.

Money, money, money. It could not buy back his own body. He needed leverage, a weapon, pressure to apply.

He called the public information service, requested the file on "golasma." It was unknown.

He drew more marks, scribbled meaningless patterns, where was Mervyn Allen vulnerable? The Chateau d'If, the Empyrean Tower. Once more he dialed into the public information service, requested the sequence on the Empyrean Tower. Typescript flashed across his screen.

The Empyrean Tower will be a multiple-function building at a site in Meadowlands. The highest level will be three miles above ground. The architects are Kubal Associates, Incorporated, of Lanchester. Foundation contracts have been let to Lourey and Lyble—"

Mario touched the shift button; the screen showed an architect's pencil sketch—a slender structure pushing through cloud layers into the clear blue sky. Mario touched the shift button.

Now came detailed information, as to the weight, cubic volume, comparison with the Pyramids, the Chilung Gorge Dam, the Skatterholm complex at Ronn, the Hawke Pylon, the World's Mart at Dar es Salaam.

Mario pushed at his communicator button. No answer. Still too early. Impatient now, he ordered coffee, drank two cups, pacing the office nervously.

At last a voice answered his signal. "When Mr. Correaos comes in, I'd like to speak to him."'

Five minutes later Louis Correaos knocked at his door.

"'Morning, Louis," said Mario.

"Good morning, Mr. Ebery," said Correaos with a tight guarded expression, as if expecting the worst.

Mario said, "Louis, I want some advice . . . have you ever heard of Kubal Associates, Incorporated? Architects?"

"No. Can't say as I have."

"I don't want to distract you from your work," said Mario, "but I want to acquire control of that company. Quietly. Secretly, even. I'd like you to make some quiet inquiries. Don't use my name. Buy up as much voting stock as is being offered. Go as high as you like, but get the stock. And don't use my name."

Correaos' face became a humorous mask, with a bitter twist to his mouth. "What am I supposed to use for money?"

Mario rubbed the flabby folds around his jaw. "*Hm.* There's no reserve fund, no bank balance?"

Correaos looked at him queerly.

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"You should know."

Mario squinted off to the side. True, he should know. To Louis Correaos, this was Ralston Ebery sitting before him —the arbitrary, domineering Ralston Ebery. Mario said, "Check on how much we can raise, will you, Louis?"

Correaos said, "Just a minute." He left the room. He returned with a bit of paper.

"I've been figuring up retooling costs. We'll have to borrow. It's none of my business what you did with the fund."

Mario smiled grimly. "You'd never understand, Louis. And if I told you, you wouldn't believe me. Just forget it. It's gone."

"The South African agency sent a draft for a little over a million yesterday. That won't even touch retooling."

Mario made an impatient gesture. "We'll get a loan. Right now you've got a million. See how much of Kubal Associates you can buy."

Correaos left the room without a word. Mario muttered to himself, "Thinks I'm off my nut. Figures he'll humor me. . . ."

All morning Mario turned old files through his desk-screen, trying to catch the thread of Ebery's business. There was much evidence of Ebery's hasty plundering—the cashing of bonds, disposal of salable assets, transference of the depreciation funds into his personal account. But in spite of the pillaging, Ebery Air-car seemed financially sound. It held mortgages, franchises, contracts worth many times what cash Ebery had managed to clear.

TIRING of the files, he ordered more coffee, paced the floor. His mind turned to 19 Seafoam Place. He thought of the accusing eyes of Florence Ebery, the hostility of Luther and Ralston Jr. And Mario wished Ralston Ebery a place in hell. Ebery's family was no responsibility, no concern of his. He called Florence Ebery.

"Florence, I won't be living at home any more." He tried to speak kindly.

She said, "That's what I thought."

Mario said hurriedly, "I think that, by and large, you'd be better off with a divorce. I won't contest it; you can have as much money as you want."

She gave him a fathomless silent stare. "That's what I thought," she said again. The screen went dead.

Correaos returned shortly after lunch. It was warm, Correaos had walked the pedestrip, his face shone with perspiration.

He flung a carved black plastic folder on the desk, baring his teeth in a triumphant smile. "There it is. I don't know what you want with it, but there it is. Fifty-two percent of the stock. I bought it off of old man Kubal's nephew and a couple of the associates. Got 'em at the right time; they were glad to sell. They don't like the way the business is going. Old man Kubal gives all his time to the Empyrean Tower, and he's not taking any fee for the work. Says the honor of the job is enough. The nephew doesn't dare to fight it out with old man Kubal, but he sure was glad to sell out. The same with Kohn and Cheever, the associates. The Empyrean Tower job doesn't even pay the office overhead."

"*Hm.* How old is Kubal?"

"Must be about eighty. Lively old boy, full of vinegar."

Honor of the job! thought Mario. Rubbish! Old Kubal's fee would be a young body. Aloud he said, "Louis, have you ever seen Kubal?"

"No, he hardly shows his face around the office. He lines up the jobs, the engineering is done in the office."

"Louis," said Mario, "here's what I want you to do. Record the stock in your own name, give me an undated transfer, which we won't record. You'll legally control the firm. Call the office, get hold of the general manager. Tell him that you're sending me over. I'm just a friend of yours you owe a favor to. Tell him that I'm to be given complete and final authority over any job I decide to work on. Get it?"

Correaos eyed Mario as if he expected the fat body to explode into fire. "Anything you like. I suppose you know what you're doing."

Mario grinned ruefully. "I can't think

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of anything else to do. In the meantime, bring out your new model. You're in charge."

Mario dressed Ralston Ebery's body in modest blue, reported to the office of Kubal Associates, an entire floor in the Rothenburg Building. He asked the receptionist for the manager and was shown in to a tall man in the early forties with a delicate lemonish face. He had a freckled forehead, thin sandy hair, and he answered Mario's questions with sharpness and hostility.

"My name is Taussig. . . . No, I'm just the office manager. Kohn ran the draughting room, Cheever the engineering. They're both out. The office is a mess. I've been here twelve years."

Mario assured him that there was no intention of stepping in over him. "No, Mr. Taussig, you're in charge. I speak for the new control. You handle the office—general routine, all the new jobs—just as usual. Your title is general manager. I want to work on the Empyrean Tower—without any interference. I won't bother you, you won't bother me. Right? After the Empyrean Tower, I leave and the entire office is yours."

Taussig's face unwound from around the lines of suspicion. "There's not much going on except the Empyrean Tower. Naturally that's a tremendous job in itself. Bigger than any one man."

Mario remarked that he did not expect to draw up the entire job on his own bench, and Taussig's face tightened again, at the implied sarcasm. No, said Mario, he merely would be the top ranking authority on the job, subject only to the wishes of the builder.

"One last thing," said Mario. "This talk we've had must be," he tilted Taussig a sidelong wink, "strictly confidential. You'll introduce me as a new employee, that's all. No word of the new control. No word of his being a friend of mine. Forget it. Get me?"

Taussig agreed with sour dignity.

"I want quiet," said Mario thoughtfully. "I want no contact with any of the principals. The interviews with the press—you handle those. Conferences with the builder, changes, modifications—you attend to them. I'm merely in the background."

"Just as you say," said Taussig.

CHAPTER VII

Empyrean Tower

EMPYREAN TOWER became as much a part of Mario's life as his breath, his pulse. Twelve hours a day, thirteen, fourteen, Ebery's fat body sat slumped at the long desk, and Ebery's eyes burned and watered from poring through estimates, details, floor-plans. On the big screen four feet before his eyes flowed the work of twenty-four hundred draughtsmen, eight hundred engineers, artists, decorators, craftsmen without number, everything subject to his approval. But his influence was restrained, nominal, unnoticed. Only in a few details did Mario interfere, and then so carefully, so subtly, that the changes were unknown.

The new building techniques, the control over material, the exact casting of plancheen and allied substances, prefabrication, effortless transport of massive members made the erection of the Empyrean Tower magically easy and swift. Level by level it reached into the air, growing like a macrocosmic bean sprout. Steel, concrete, plancheen floors and walls, magnesium girders, outriggers, buttresses, the new bubble-glass for windows—assembled into precise units, hoisted, dropped into place from freight copters.

All day and all night the blue glare of the automatic welders burnt the sky, and sparks spattered against the stars, and every day the aspiring bulk pushed closer to the low clouds. Then through the low clouds, up toward the upper levels. Sun at one stage, rain far below. Up mile after mile, into the regions of air where the wind always swept like cream, undisturbed, unalloyed with the warm fetor of earth.

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Mario was lost in the Empyrean Tower. He knew the range of materials, the glitter of a hundred metals, the silky gloss of plancheen, the color of the semi-precious minerals: jade, cinnabar, malachite, agate, jet, rare porphyries from under the Antarctic ranges. Mario forgot himself, forgot the Chateau d'If, forgot Mervyn Allen, Thane, Louis Correaos and Ebery Air-car, except for spasmodic, disassociated spells when he tore himself away from the Rothenburg Building for a few hours.

And sometimes, when he would be most engrossed, he would find to his horror that his voice his disposition, his mannerisms were not those of Roland Mario. Ralston Ebery's lifelong reflexes and habits were making themselves felt. And Roland Mario felt a greater urgency. Build, build, build!

And nowhere did Mario work more carefully than on the 900th level—the topmost floor, noted on the index as offices and living quarters for Mervyn Allen. With the most intricate detail did Mario plan the construction, specifying specially-built girders, ventilating equipment, all custom-made to his own dimensions.

And so months in Mario's life changed their nature from future to past, months during which he became almost accustomed to Ralston Ebery's body.

On a Tuesday night Mario's personality had been fitted into Ralston Ebery's body. Wednesday morning he had come to his senses. Friday he was deep in concentration at the office of Ebery Air-car in the Aetherian Block, and three o'clock passed without his awareness. Friday evening he thought of the Oxonian Terrace, his rendezvous with Janniver, Breaugh, the nameless spirit in the sick body named Ditmar. And the next Tuesday at three, Mario was sitting at a table on the Oxonion Terrace.

Twenty feet away sat Janniver, Breaugh, Ditmar. And Mario thought back to the day only a few weeks ago when the five sat lackadaisically in the sun. Four innocents and one man eying them hungrily, weighing the price their bodies would bring.

Two of those bodies he had won. And Mario saw them sitting quietly in the warm sunlight, talking slowly—two of them, at least, peaceful and secure. Breaugh spoke with the customary cocksure tilt to his dark head, Janniver was slow and sober, an odd chording of racial vibrants. And there was Ditmar, a foreign soul looking sardonically from the lean dark-bronze body. A sick body, that a man paying ten thousand dollars for adventure would consider a poor bargain. Ditmar had bought adventure—an adventure in pain and fear. For a moment Mario's flinty mood loosened enough to admit that in yearning for his old own life in his old own body, a man might easily forget decency, fairness. The drowning man strangles a would-be rescuer.

MARIO sipped beer indecisively. Should he join the three? It could do no harm. He was detained by a curious reluctance, urgent, almost a sense of shame. To speak to these men, tell them what their money had bought him—Mario felt the warm stickiness, the internal crawling of extreme embarrassment. At sudden thought, Mario scanned the nearby tables. Zaer. He had almost forgotten Pete Zaer. A millionaire's mind lived in Zaer's body. Would Zaer's mind bring the millionaire's body here?

Mario saw an old man with hollow eyes alone at a nearby table. Mario stared, watched his every move. The old man lit a cigarette, puffed, flicked the match—one of Zaer's tricks. The cigarette between his fingers, he lifted his highball, drank, once, twice, put the cigarette in his mouth, set the glass down. Zaer's mannerism.

Mario rose, moved, took a seat. The old man looked up eagerly, then angrily, from dry red-rimmed eyes. The skin was a calcined yellow, the mouth was gray. Zaer had bought even less for his money than Mario.

"Is your name Pete Zaer?" asked Mario. "In disguise?"

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The old man's mouth worked. The eyes swam. "How— Why do you say that?"

Mario said, "Look at the table. Who else is missing?"

"Roland Mario," said the old man in a thin rasping voice. The red eyes peered. "*You!*"

"That's right," said Mario, with a sour grin. "In a week or two maybe there'll be three of us, maybe four." He motioned. "Look at them. What are they shaking dice for?"

"We've got to stop them," rasped Zaer. "They don't *know*." But he did not move. Nor did Mario. It was like trying to make himself step naked out upon a busy street.

Something rigid surrounded, took hold of Mario's brain. He stood up. "You wait here," he muttered. "I'll try to put a stop to it."

He ambled across the sun-drenched terrace, to the table where Janniver was rolling dice. Mario reached his hands down, caught up the meaningful cubes.

Janniver looked up with puzzled eyes. Breaugh bent his straight Welsh eyebrows in the start of a temper. Ditmar, frowning, leaned back.

"Excuse me," said Mario. "May I ask what you're rolling for?"

Breaugh said, "A private matter. It does not concern you."

"Does it concern the Chateau d'If?"

Six eyes stared.

"Yes," said Breaugh, after a second or two of hesitation.

Mario said, "I'm a friend of Roland Mario's. I have a message from him."

"What is it?"

"He said to stay away from the Chateau d'If; not to waste your money. He said not to trust anyone who suggested for you to go there."

Breaugh snorted. "Nobody's suggesting anything to anybody."

"And he says he'll get in touch with you soon."

Mario left without formality, returned to where he had left Zaer. The old man with the hot red eyes was gone.

Ralston Ebery had many enemies, so Mario found. There were a large number of acquaintances, no friends. And there was one white-faced creature that seemed to live only to waylay him, hiss vileness. This was Letya Arnold, a former employee in the research laboratories.

Mario ignored the first and second meetings, and on the third he told the man to keep out of his way. "Next time I'll call the police."

"Filth-tub," gloated Arnold. "You wouldn't dare! The publicity would ruin you, and you know it, you know it!"

Mario inspected the man curiously. He was clearly ill. His breath reeked of internal decay. Under a loose gray-brown jacket his chest was concave, his shoulders pushed forward like doorknobs. His eyes were a curious shiny black, so black that the pupils were indistinguishable from the iris, and the eyes looked like big black olives pressed into two bowls of sour milk.

"There's a patrolman now," said Arnold. "Call him, mucknose, call him!"

QUICKLY Mario turned, walked away, and Arnold's laughter rang against his back.

Mario asked Louis Correaos about Letya Arnold. "Why wouldn't I dare have him arrested?"

And Correaos turned on him one of his long quizzical stares. "Don't you know?"

Mario remembered that Correaos thought he was Ebery. He rubbed his forehead. "I'm forgetful, Louis. Tell me about Letya Arnold."

"He worked in the radiation lab, figured out some sort of process that saved fuel. We naturally had a legal right to the patent." Correaos smiled sardonically. "Naturally we didn't use the process, since you owned stock in World Air-Power, and a big block of Lamarr Atomics. Arnold began unauthorized use. We took it to court, won, recovered damages. It put Arnold into debt and he hasn't been worth anything since."

Mario said with sudden energy, "Let

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me see that patent, Louis."

Correaos spoke into the mesh and a minute later a sealed envelope fell out of the slot into the catch-all.

Correaos said idly, "Myself, I think Arnold was either crazy or a fake. The idea he had couldn't work. Like perpetual motion."

Letya Arnold had written a short preface to the body of the paper, this latter a mass of circuits and symbols unintelligible to Mario.

The preface read:

Efficiency in propulsion is attained by expelling ever smaller masses at ever higher velocities. The limit, in the first case, is the electron. Expelling it at speeds approaching that of light, we find that its mass increases by the well-known effect. This property provides us a perfect propulsive method, capable of freeing flight from its dependence upon heavy loads of material to be ejected at relatively slow velocities. One electron magnetically repelled at near-light speeds, exerts as much forward recoil as many pounds of conventional fuel. . . .

Mario knew where to find Letya Arnold. The man sat brooding day after day in Tanagra Square, on a bench beside the Centennial Pavilion. Mario stopped in front of him, a young-old man with a hysterical face.

Arnold looked up, arose, eagerly, almost as if he would assault Mario physically.

Mario in a calm voice said, "Arnold, pay attention a minute. You're right, I'm wrong."

Arnold's face hung slack as a limp bladder. Attack needs resistance on which to harden itself. Feebly his fury asserted itself. He reeled off his now-familiar invective. Mario listened a minute.

"Arnold, the process you invented—have you ever tested it in practise?"

"Of course, you swine. Naturally. Of course. What do you take me for? One of your blow-hard call-boys?"

"It works, you say. Now listen, Arnold: we're working on a new theory at Ebery Air-car. We're planning to put out value at low cost. I'd like to build your process into the new model. If it actually does what you say. And I'd like to have you come back to work for us."

Letya Arnold sneered, his whole face a gigantic sneer. "Put that propulsion into an air-boat? *Pah!* Use a drop-forge to kill a flea? Where's your head, where's your head? It's space-drive; that's where we're going. Space!"

It was Mario's turn to be taken aback. "Space? Will it work in space?" he asked weakly.

"Work? It's just the thing! You took all my money—you!" The words were like skewers, dripping an acrid poison. "If I had my money now, patent or no patent, I'd be out in space. I'd be ducking around Alpha Centauri, Sirius, Vega, Capella!"

The man was more than half-mad, thought Mario. He said, "You can't go faster than light."

LETYA ARNOLD'S voice became calm, crafty. "Who said I can't? You don't know the things I know, swine-slut."

Mario said, "No, I don't. But all that aside, I'm a changed man, Arnold. I want you to forget any injustice I may have done you. I want you back at work for Ebery Air-car. I'd like you to adapt the drive for public use."

Again Arnold sneered. "And kill everything that happened to be behind you? Every electron shot from the reactor would be like a meteor; there'd be blasts of incandescent air; impact like a cannon-ball. No, no—space. That's where the drive must go. . . ."

"You're hired, if you want to be," said Mario patiently. "The laboratory's waiting for you. I want you to work on that adaptation. There must be some kind of shield." Noting the taut clamp to Arnold's mouth, he said hastily, "If you think you can go faster than light, fine! Build a ship for space and I'll test-fly it myself. But put in your major effort on the adaptation for public use, that's all I ask."

Arnold, cooler by the minute, now exhibited the same kind of sardonic unbelief Mario had noticed in Correaos. "Blow me, but you've changed your tune, Ebery. Before it was money, money, money. If it didn't make you

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money, plow it under. What happened to you?"

"The Chateau d'If," said Mario. "If you value your sanity, don't go there. Though God knows," and he looked at Arnold's wasted body, "you couldn't do much worse for yourself than you've already done."

"If it changes me as much as it's changed you, I'm giving it a wide berth. Blow me, but you're almost human."

"I'm a changed man," said Mario. "Now go to Correaos, get an advance, go to a doctor."

On his way to the Rothenburg Building and Kubal Associates it came to him to wonder how Ebery was using his body. In his office he ran down a list of detective agencies, settled on Brannan Investigators, called them, put them to work.

CHAPTER VIII

Inventor With a Grudge

INVESTIGATOR Murris Slade, the detective, was a short thick-set man with a narrow head. Two days after Mario had called the Brannan agency, he knocked at Mario's workroom at Kubal Associates.

Mario looked through the wicket in the locked door, admitted the detective, who said without preamble, "I've found your man."

"Good," said Mario, returning to his seat. "What's he doing?"

Slade said, in a quiet accentless voice, "There's no mystery or secrecy involved. He seems to have changed his way of living in the last few months. I understand he was quite a chap, pretty well-liked, nothing much to set him apart. One of the idle rich. Now he's a hell-raiser, a woman-chaser, and he's been thrown out of every bar in town."

My poor body thought Mario. Aloud: "Where's he living?"

"He's got an apartment at the Atlantic-Empire, fairly lush place. It's a mystery where he gets his money."

The Atlantic-Empire seemed to have become a regular rendezvous for Chateau d'If alumni, thought Mario. He said, "I want a weekly report on this man. Nothing complicated—just a summary of where he spends his time. Now, I've got another job for you. . . ."

The detective reported on the second job a week later.

"Mervyn Allen is an alias. The man was born Lloyd Paren, in Vienna. The woman is his sister, Thane Paren. Originally he was a photographer's model, something of a playboy—up until a few years ago. Then he came into a great deal of money. Now, as you probably know, he runs the Chateau d'If. I can't get anything on that. There's rumors, but anybody that knows anything won't talk. The rumors are not in accord with Paren's background, which is out in the open—no medical or psychosomatic training. The woman was originally a music student, a specialist in primitive music. When Paren left Vienna, she came with him. Paren lives at Fifty-six Hundred Exmoor Avenue—that's the Chateau d'If. Thane Paren lives in a little apartment about a block away, with an old man, no relative. Neither one seems to have any intimate friends, and there's no entertaining, no parties. Not much to go on."

Mario reflected a few moments, somberly gazing out the window while Murris Slade sat impassively waiting for Mario's instructions. At last Mario said, "Keep at it. Get some more on the old man Thane Paren lives with."

One day Correaos called Mario on the telescreen. "We've got the new model blocked out." He was half-placating, half-challenging, daring Mario to disapprove of his work.

"I think we've done a good job," said Correaos. "You wanted to give it a final check."

"I'll be right over," said Mario.

The new model had been built by hand at the Donnic River Plant and flown into Lanchester under camouflage. Correaos managed the showing as if Mario were a buyer, in whom he

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was trying to whip up enthusiasm.

"The idea of this model—I've tentatively called it the Airfarer—was to use materials which were plain and cheap, dispense with all unnecessary ornament—which, in my opinion, has been the bane of the Ebery Air-car. We've put the savings into clean engineering, lots of room, safety. Notice the lift vanes, they're recessed, almost out of reach. No drunk is going to walk into them. Those pulsors, they're high, and the deflection jets are out of reach. The frame and fuselage are solid cast plancheen, first job like this in the business."

Mario listened, nodded appreciatively from time to time. Apparently Correaos had done a good job. He asked, "How about what's-his-name—Arnold? Has he come up with anything useful?"

Correaos bared his teeth, clicked his tongue. "That man's crazy. He's a walking corpse. All he thinks, all he talks are his pestiferous electrons, what he calls a blast effect. I saw a demonstration, and I think he's right. We can't use it in a family vehicle."

"What's the jet look like?"

CORREAOS shrugged. "Nothing much. A generator—centaurium powered—a miniature synchroton. Very simple. He feeds a single electron into the tube, accelerates it to the near-light speed, and it comes roaring out in a gush as thick as your arm."

Mario frowned. "Try to steer him back onto something useful. He's got the brains. Has he been to a doctor?"

"Just Stapp, the insurance doctor. Stapp says it's a wonder he's alive now. Galloping nephritis or necrosis—some such thing." Correaos spoke without interest. His eyes never left his new Airfarer. He said with more life in his voice, "Look into the interior, notice the wide angle of vision; also the modulating glare filter. Look right up into the sun, all you want. Notice the altimeter, it's got a positive channel indicator, that you can set for any given locality. Then the pressurizer, it's built in under the rear seat—see it?—saves about twenty dollars a unit over the old system. Instead of upholstery, I've had the framework machined smooth, and sprayed it with sprinjufloss."

"You've done a good job, Louis," said Mario. "Go ahead with it."

Correaos took a deep breath, released it, shook his head. "I'll be dyed-double-and-throttled!"

"What's the trouble?"

"I don't get you at all," said Correaos, staring at Mario as if he were a stranger. "If I didn't know you stem to stern, I'd say you were a different man. Three months ago, if I'd tried to put something cleanly designed in front of you, you'd have gone off like one of Arnold's electrons. You'd have called this job a flying bread-box. You'd have draped angel's-wings all over the outside, streamlined the dashboard fixtures, built in two or three Louis Fifteenth book cases. I don't know what-all. If you didn't look so healthy, I'd say you were sick."

Mario said with an air of sage deliberation, "Ebery Air-car has taken a lot of money out of the public. The old Ebery managed to keep itself in the air, but it cost a lot and looked like a pagoda on wings. Now we'll start giving 'em quality. Maybe they'll turn it down."

Correaos laughed exultantly. "If we can't sell ten million of these, I'll run one up as high as she'll go and jump."

"Better start selling, then."

"I hope you don't have a relapse," said Correaos, "and order a lot of fancy fittings."

"No," said Mario mildly. "She'll go out just as she is, so long as I have anything to say about it."

Correaos slapped the hull of the Airfarer approvingly, turned a quizzical face to Mario. "Your wife has been trying to get in touch with you. I told her I didn't know where you were. You'd better call her—if you want to stay married. She was talking about divorce."

Mario looked off into the distance, uncomfortably aware of Correaos' scrutiny. "I told her to go ahead with it. It's the best thing for everybody concerned.

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Fairest for her, at any rate."

Correaos shook his head. "You're a funny fellow, Ebery. A year ago you'd have fired me a dozen times over."

"Maybe I'm getting you fat for the slaughter," suggested Mario.

"Maybe," said Correaos. "Letya Arnold and I can go into business making electron elephant guns."

TWO hundred thousand artisans swarmed over the Tower, painting, plastering, spraying, fitting in pipes, wires, pouring terazzo, concrete, plancheen, installing cabinets, a thousand kinds of equipment. Walls were finished with panels of waxed and polished woods, the myriad pools were tiled, the gardeners landscaped the hanging parks, the great green bowers in the clouds.

Every week Mervyn Allen conferred with Taussig and old man Kubal, approving, modifying, altering, cancelling, expanding. From recorded copies of the interviews Mario worked, making the changes Allen desired, meshing them carefully into his own designs.

Months passed. Now Mervyn Allen might not have recognized this man as Ralston Ebery. At the Ebery Air-car office in the Aetherian Block, his employees were astounded, respectful. It was a new Ralston Ebery—though, to be sure, they noticed the old gestures, the tricks of speech, habits of walking, dressing, involuntary expressions. This new Ralston Ebery had sloughed away fifty pounds of oil and loose flesh. The sun had tinted the white skin to a baby pink. The eyes, once puffy, now shone out of meaty cheeks; the leg muscles were tough with much walking; the chest was deeper, the lungs stronger from the half-hour of swimming every afternoon at four o'clock.

And at last the two hundred thousand artisans packed their tools, collected their checks. Maintenance men came on the job. Laborers swept, scrubbed, polished. The Empyrean Tower was complete—a solidified dream, a wonder of the world. A building rising like a pine tree, supple and massive, overbounding the minuscule streets and squares below. An edifice not intended for grace, yet achieving grace through its secure footing, its incalculable tapers, set-backs, thousand terraces, thousand taxiplats, million windows.

The Empyrean Tower was completed. And Mervyn Allen moved in on a quiet midnight, and the next day the Chateau d'If at 5600 Exmoor Avenue, Meadowlands, was vacant, for sale or for lease.

The Chateau d'If was now Level 900, Empyrean Tower. And Roland Mario ached with eagerness, anxiety, a hot gladness intense to the point of lust. He was slowly cleaning off his desk, when Taussig poked his head into the office.

"Well, what are you planning to do now?"

Mario inspected Taussig's curious face. "Any more big jobs?"

"Nope. And not likely to be. At least not through old man Kubal."

"How come? Has he retired?"

"Retired? Shucks, no. He's gone crazy. Schizo."

Mario drummed his fingers on his desk. "When did all this happen?"

"Just yesterday. Seems like finishing the Empyrean was too much for him. A cop found him in Tanagra Square talking to himself, took him home. Doesn't know his nephew, doesn't know his housekeeper. Keeps saying his name is Bray, something like that."

"Bray?" Mario rose to his feet, his forehead knotting. Breaugh. "Sounds like senile decay," he said abstractedly.

"That's right," Taussig responded, still fixing Mario with bright curious eyes. "So what are you going to do now?"

"I quit," said Mario, with an exaggerated sweep of the arm. "I'm done, I'm like old man Kubal. The Empyrean Tower's too much for me. I've got senile decay. Take a good look, Taussig, you'll never see me again." He closed the door in Taussig's slack face. He stepped into the elevator, dropped to the second level, hopped the high-speed strip to

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his small apartment at Melbourne House. He thumbed the lock, the scanner recognized his prints, the door slid back. Mario entered, closed the door. He undressed Ebery's gross body, wrapped it in a robe, sank with a grunt into a chair beside a big low table.

The table held a complex model built of wood, metal, plastic, vari-colored threads. It represented Level 900, Empyrean Tower—the Chateau d'If.

Mario knew it by heart. Every detail of an area a sixth of a mile square was pressed into his brain.

PRESENTLY Mario dressed again, in coveralls of hard gray twill. He loaded his pockets with various tools and equipment, picked up his handbag. He looked at himself in the mirror, at the face that was Ebery and yet not quite Ebery. The torpid glaze had left the eyes. The lips were no longer puffy, the jowls had pulled up, his face was a meaty slab. Thoughtfully Mario pulled a cap over his forehead, surveyed the effect. The man was unrecognizable. He attached a natty wisp of mustache. Ralston Ebery no longer existed.

Mario left the apartment. He hailed a cab, flew out to Meadowlands. The Empyrean Tower reared over the city like a fence-post standing over a field of cabbages. An aircraft beacon scattered red rays from a neck-twisting height. A million lights from nine hundred levels glowed, blended into a rich milky shimmer. A city in itself, where two million, three million men and women might live their lives out if they so wished. It was a monument to the boredom of one man, a man sated with life. The most magnificent edifice ever built, and built for the least consequential of motives that ever caused one rock to be set on another. The Empyrean Tower, built from the conglomerate resources of the planet's richest wealth, was a gigantic toy, a titillation, a fancy.

But who would know this? The 221st Level housed the finest hospital in the world. The staff read like the Medical Associations list of Yearly Honors. Level 460 held an Early Cretaceous swamp-forest. Full-scale dinosaurs cropped at archaic vegetation, pterodactyls slipped by on invisible guides, the air held the savage stench of swamp, black ooze, rotting mussels, carrion.

Level 461 enclosed the first human city, Eridu of Sumer, complete with its thirty-foot brick walls, the ziggurat temple to Enlil the Earth god, the palace of the king, the mud huts of the peasants. Level 462 was a Mycenaean Island, lapped by blue salt water. A Minoan temple in an olive grove crowned the height, and a high-beaked galley floated on the water, with sunlight sparkling from bronze shields, glowing from the purple sail.

Level 463 was a landscape from an imaginary fantastic world created by mystic-artist Dyer Lothaire. And Level 509 was a private fairyland, closed to the public, a magic garden inhabited by furtive nymphs.

There were levels for business offices, for dwellings, for laboratories. The Fourth level enclosed the world's largest stadium. Levels 320 through 323 housed the University of the World, and the initial enrollment was forty-two thousand; 255 was the world's vastest library; 328 a vast art gallery.

There were showrooms, retail stores, restaurants, quiet taverns, theaters, telecast studios—a complex of the world society caught, pillared up into the air at the whim of Mervyn Allen. Humanity's lust for lost youth had paid for it. Mervyn Allen sold a commodity beside which every ounce of gold ever mined, every prized possession, every ambition and goal were like nothing. Eternal life, replenished youth—love, loyalty, decency, honor found them unfair overstrong antagonists.

CHAPTER IX

Eyes in the Wall

BRISKLY Mario alighted from the aircab at the public stage on the 52nd level, the coordination center of

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the tower. Among the crowds of visitors, tenants, employees, he was inconspicuous. He stepped on a pedestrip to the central shaft, stepped off at the express elevator to Level 600. He entered one of the little cars. The door snapped shut, he felt the surge of acceleration, and almost at once the near-weightlessness of the slowing. The door flicked open, he stepped out on Level 600, two miles in the air.

He was in the lobby of the Paradise Inn, beside which the Atlantic-Empire lobby was mean and constricted. He moved among exquisitely dressed men and women, persons of wealth, dignity, power. Mario was inconspicuous. He might have been a janitor or a maintenance electrician. He walked quietly down a corridor, stopped at last by a door marked *Private*. He thumbed the lock; it opened into a janitor's closet. But the janitors for the 600th level all had other storerooms. No other thumb would spring this lock. In case an officious floor-manager forced the door, it was merely another janitor's closet lost in the confusion.

But it was a very special closet. At the back wall, Mario pushed at a widely-separated pair of studs, and the wall fell aside. Mario entered a dark crevice, pushed the wall back into place. Now he was alone—more alone than if he were in the middle of the Sahara. Out in the desert a passing aircraft might spy him. Here in the dead spaces alongside the master columns, among elevator shafts, he was lost from every eye. If he died, no one would find him. In the far, far future, when the Empyrean Tower was at last pulled down, his skeleton might be exposed. Until then he had vanished from the knowledge of man.

He shone his flash-light ahead of him, turned to the central spinal cord of elevator shafts, tubes like fibers in a tremendous vegetable. Here he found his private elevator, lost among the others like a man in a crowd. The mechanics who installed it could not recognize its furtive purpose. It was a job from a blue-print, part of the day's work, quickly forgotten. To Mario it was a link to Level 900, the Chateau d'If.

He stepped on the tiny platform. The door snapped. Up he was thrown, up a mile. The car halted, he stepped out. He was in the Chateau d'If—invisible, a ghost. Unseen, unheard, power was his. He could strike from nothingness, unsuspected, unimagined, master of the master of the Chateau d'If.

He breathed the air, exultant, thrilling to his power. This was the ultimate height of his life. He snapped on his torch, though there was no need. He knew these passages as if he had been born among them. The light was a symbol of his absolute authority. He had no need for skulking. He was in his private retreat, secure, isolated, remote.

Mario halted, glanced at the wall. At the eight-foot intervals circles of fluorescent paint gleamed brightly. Behind this wall would be the grand foyer to the Chateau d'If. Mario advanced to one of the fluorescent circles. These he himself had painted to mark the location of his spy cells. These were little dull spots hardly bigger than the head of a pin, invisible at three feet. Mario, in the guise of an electrician, had installed them himself, with a pair at every location, for binocular vision.

From his pouch he brought a pair of goggles, clipped a wire to the terminal contacts of the spy cells, fitted the goggles over his eyes. Now he saw the interior of the foyer as clearly as if he were looking through a door.

It was the height of a reception—a house-warming party at the Chateau d'If. Men, old, young, distinguished or handsome or merely veneered with the glow of success; women at once serene and arrogant, the style and show of the planet. Mario saw jewels, gold, the shine and swing of thousand-colored fabrics, and at eye-level, the peculiar white-bronze-brown-black mixture, the color of many heads, many faces—crowd-color.

MARIO recognized some of these people, faces and names world-known. Artists, administrators, engi-

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neers, bon-vivants, courtesans, philosophers, all thronging the lobby of the Chateau d'If, drawn by the ineffable lure of the unknown, the exciting, the notorious.

There was Mervyn Allen, wearing black. He was as handsome as a primeval sun-hero, tall, confident, easy in his manner, but humble and carefully graceful, combining the offices of proprietor and host.

Thane Paren was nowhere in sight.

Mario moved on. As at 5600 Exmoor, he found a room drenched with amber-white light, golden, crisp as celery, where the broad-leafed plants grew as ardently as in their native humus. The herbarium was empty, the plants suspired numbing perfume for their own delectation.

Mario passed on. He looked into a room bare and undecorated, a workshop, a processing plant. A number of rubber-wheeled tables were docked against a wall, each with its frock of white cloth. A balcony across the room supported an intricate mesh of machinery, black curving arms, shiny metal, glass. Below hung a pair of translucent balls, the pallid blue color of Roquefort cheese. Mario looked closely. These were the golasma cellules.

No one occupied the chamber except a still form on one of the stretchers. The face was partly visible. Mario, suddenly attentive, shifted his vantage point. He saw a heavy blond head, rugged blunt features. He moved to another cell. He was right. It was Janniver, already drugged, ready for the transposition.

Mario gave a long heavy suspiration that shook Ebery's pauch. Ditmar had made it. Zaer, Mario, Breaugh, and now Janniver, lured into this room like sheep the Judas-goat conducts to the abbatoir. Mario bared his teeth in a grimace that was not a smile. A tide of dark rage rose in his mind.

He calmed himself. The grimace softened into the normal loose lines of Ebery's face. Who was blameless, after all? Thane Paren? No. She served Mervyn Allen, the soul in her brother's body. He himself, Roland Mario? He might have killed Mervyn Allen, he might have halted the work of the Chateau d'If by crying loudly enough to the right authorities. He had refrained, from fear of losing his body. Pete Zaer? He might have kept to the spirit of his bargain, warned his friends on the Oxonian Terrace.

All the other victims, who had similarly restrained their rage and sense of obligation to their fellow-men? No, Ditmar was simply a human being, as weak and selfish as any other, and his sins were those of commission rather than those of omission, which characterized the others.

Mario wandered on, peering in apartment, chamber and hall. A blonde girl, young and sweet as an Appalachian gilly-flower, swam nude in Allen's long green-glass pool, then sat on the edge amid a cloud of silver bubbles. Mario cursed the lascivious responses of Ebery's body, passed on. Nowhere did he see Thane Paren.

He returned to the reception hall. The party was breaking up, with Mervyn Allen bowing his guests out, men and women flushed with his food and drink, all cordial, all promising themselves to renew the acquaintance on a later, less conspicuous occasion.

Mario watched till the last had left —the last but one, this an incredibly tall, thin old man, dressed like a fop in pearl-gray and white. His wrists were like corn-stalks, his head was all skull. He leaned across Mervyn Allen's shoulder, a roguish perfumed old dandy, waxed, rouged, pomaded.

Now Allen made a polite inquiry, and the old man nodded, beamed. Allen ushered him into a small side-room, an office painted dark gray and green.

The old man sat down, wrote a check. Allen dropped it into the telescreen slot, and the two waited, making small talk. The old man seemed to be pressing for information, while Allen gracefully brushed him aside. The television flickered, flashed an acknowledgement from the bank. Allen rose to his feet. The old man arose. Allen took a deep breath;

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they stepped into the herbarium. The old man took three steps, tottered. Allen caught him deftly, laid him on a concealed rubber-tired coach, wheeled him forward, out into the laboratory where Janniver lay aready.

NOW Mario watched with the most careful of eyes, and into a socket in his gogles he plugged another cord leading to a camera in his pouch. Everything he saw would be recorded permanently.

There was little to see. Allen wheeled Janniver under one of the whey-colored golasma cellules, the old man under another. He turned a dial, kicked at a pedal, flicked a switch, stood back. The entire balcony lowered. The cellules engulfed the two heads, pulsed, changed shape. There was motion on the balcony, wheels turning, the glow of luminescence. The operation appeared self-contained, automatic.

Allen seated himself, lit a cigarette, yawned. Five minutes passed. The balcony rose, the golasma cellules swung on an axis, the balcony lowered. Another five minutes passed. The balcony raised. Allen stepped forward, threw off the switches.

Allen gave each body an injection from the same hypodermic, rolled the couches into an adjoining room, departed without a backward glance.

Toward the swimming pool, thought Mario. Let him go!

At nine o'clock in Tanagra Square, a cab dropped off a feeble lack-luster old man, tall and thin as a slat, who immediately sought a bench.

Mario awaited till the old man showed signs of awareness, watched the dawning alarm, the frenzied examination of emaciated hands, the realization of fifty stolen years. Mario approached, led the old man to a cab, took him to his apartment. The morning was a terrible one.

Janniver was asleep, exhausted from terror, grief, hate for his creaking old body. Mario called the Brannan agency, asked for Murris Slade. The short heavy man with the narrow head appeared on the screen, gazed through the layers of ground glass at Mario.

"Hello, Slade," said Mario. "There's a job I want done tonight."

Slade looked at him with a steady wary eye. "Does it get me in trouble?"

"No."

"What's the job?"

"This man you've been watching for me, Roland Mario, do you know where to find him?"

"He's at the Persian Terrace having breakfast with the girl he spent the night with. Her name is Laura Lingtza; she's a dancer at the Vedanta Epic Theater."

"Never mind about that. Get a piece of paper, copy what I'm going to dictate."

"Go ahead, I'm ready."

"'Meet me at eleven p.m. at the Cambodian Pillar, lobby of Paradise Inn, Level Six Hundred, Empyrean Tower. Important. Come by yourself. Please be on time, as I can spare only a few minutes. Mervyn Allen, Chateau d'If.'"

Mario waited a moment till Slade looked up from his writing. "Type that out," he said. "Hand it to Roland Mario at about nine-thirty tonight."

CHAPTER X

New Bodies for Old

RESTLESSLY Mario paced the floor, pudgy hands glasped behind his back. Tonight would see the fruit of a year's racking toil with brain and imagination. Tonight, with luck, he would shed the hateful identity of Ralston Ebery. He thought of Louis Correaos. Poor Louis, and Mario shook his head. What would happen to Louis' Airfarer? And Letya Arnold? Would he go back out into Tanagra Square to lurk and hiss as Ralston Ebery sauntered pompously past.

He called the Aetherian Block, got put through to Louis Correaos. "How's everything, Louis?"

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"Going great. We're all tooled up, be producing next week."

"How's Arnold?"

Correaos screwed up his face. "Ebery, you'll think I'm as crazy as Arnold. But he can fly faster than light."

"What?"

"Last Thursday night he wandered into the office. He acted mysterious, told me to follow him. I went. He took me up to his observatory—just a window at the sky where he's got a little proton magniscope. He focused it, told me to look. I looked, saw a disk—a dull dark disk about as large as a full moon. 'Pluto,' said Arnold. 'In about ten minutes, there'll be a little white flash on the left-hand side.' 'How do you know?' 'I set off a flare a little over six hours ago. The light should be reaching here about now.'

"I gave him a queer look, but I kept my eye glued on the image, and sure enough—there it was, a little spatter of white light. 'Now watch,' he says, 'there'll be a red one.' And he's right. There's a red light." Correaos shook his big sandy head. "Ebery, I'm convinced. He's got me believing him."

Mario said in a toneless voice, "Put him on, Louis, if you can find him."

After a minute or so Letya Arnold's peaked face peered out of the screen. Mario said leadenly, "Is this true, Arnold? That you're flying faster than light?"

Arnold said peevishly, "Of course it's true, why shouldn't it be true?"

"How did you do it?"

"Just hooked a couple of electron-pushers on to one of your high-altitude aircars. Nothing else. I just turned on the juice. The hook-up breaks blazing fury out of the universe. There's no acceleration, no momentum, nothing. Just speed, speed, speed, speed. Puts the stars within a few days' run, I've always told you, and you said I was crazy." His face wrenched, gall burnt at his tongue. "I'll never see them, Ebery, and you're to blame. I'm a dead man. I saw Pluto, I wrote my name on the ice, and that's how I'll be known."

He vanished from the screen. Correaos returned. "He's a goner," said Correaos gruffly. "He had a hemorrhage last night. There'll be just one more—his last."

Mario said in a far voice, "Take care of him, Louis. Because tomorrow. I'm afraid maybe things will be different."

"What do you mean—different?"

"Ralston Ebery's disposition might suffer a relapse."

"God forbid."

Mario broke the connection, went back to his pacing, but now he paced slower, and his eyes saw nothing of where he walked. . . .

Mario called a bellboy. "See that young man in the tan jacket by the Cambodian Pillar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give him this note."

"Yes, sir."

Ralston Ebery had put loose flesh on Mario's body. Pouches hung under the eyes, the mouth was loose, wet. Mario sweated in a sudden heat of pure anger. The swine, debauching a sound body, unused to the filth Ebery's brain would invent!

EBERY read the note, looked up and down the lobby. Mario had already gone. Ebery, following the instructions, turned down the corridor toward the air-baths, moving slowly, indecisively.

He came to a door marked *Private*, which stood ajar. He knocked.

"Allen, are you there? What's this all about?"

"Come in," said Mario.

Ebery cautiously shoved his head through the door. Mario yanked him forward, slapped a hand-hypo at Ebery's neck. Ebery struggled, kicked, quivered, relaxed. Mario shut the door.

"Get up," said Mario. Ebery rose to his feet, docile, glassy-eyed. Mario took him through the back door, up in the elevator, up to Level 900, the Chateau d'If.

"Sit down, don't move," said Mario. Ebery sat like a barnacle.

Mario made a careful reconnaissance. This time of night Mervyn Allen should

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be through for the day.

Allen was just finishing a transposition. Mario watched as he pushed the two recumbent forms into the outer waiting room, and then he trailed Allen to his living quarters, watched while he shed his clothes, jumped into a silk jerkin, ready for relaxation or sport with his flower-pretty blonde girl.

The coast was clear. Mario returned to where Ebery sat.

"Stand up, and follow me."

Back down the secret corridors inside the ventilation ducts, and now the laboratory was empty. Mario lifted a hasp, pulled back one of the pressed wood wall panels.

"Go in," he said. "Lie down on that couch." Ebery obeyed.

Mario wheeled him across the room to the racked putty-colored brainmolds, wheeled over another couch for himself. He held his mind in a rigid channel, letting himself think of nothing but the transposition.

He set the dials, kicked in the foot-pedal, as Allen had done. Now to climb on the couch, push one more button. He stood looking at the recumbent figure. Now was the time. Act. It was easy; just climb on the couch, reach up, push a button. But Mario stood looking, swaying slightly back and forth.

A slight sound behind him. He whirled. Thane Paren watched him with detached amusement. She made no move to come forward, to flee, to shout for help. She watched with an expression—quizzical, unhuman. Mario wondered, how can beauty be refined to such reckless heights, and still be so cold and friendless? If she were wounded, would she bleed? Now, at this moment, would she run, give the alarm? If she moved, he would kill her.

"Go ahead," said Thane. "What's stopping you? I won't interfere."

Mario had known this somehow. He turned, looked down at his flaccid body. He frowned.

"Don't like its looks?" asked Thane. "It's not how you remember yourself? You're all alike, strutting boastful animals."

"No," said Mario slowly, "I thought all I lived for was to get back my body. Now I don't know. I don't think I want it. I'm Ebery the industrialist. He's Mario, the playboy."

"Ah," said Thane raising her luminous eyebrows, "you like the money, the power."

Mario laughed, a faint hurt laugh. "You've been with those ideas too long. They've gone to your head. There's other things. The stars to explore. The galaxy—a meadow of magnificent jewels. . . . As Ebery, I can leave for the stars next week. As Mario, I go back to the Oxonian Terrace, play handball."

She took a step forward. "Are you—"

He said, "Just this last week a physicist burst through whatever the bindings are that are holding things in. He made it to Pluto in fifteen minutes. Ebery wouldn't listen to him. He's so close to dead right now, you couldn't tell the difference. Ebery would say he's crazy, jerk the whole project. Because there's no evidence other than the word of two men."

"So?" asked Thane. "What will you do?"

"I want my body," said Mario slowly. "I hate this pig's carcass worse than I hate death. But more than that, I want to go to the stars."

SHE came forward a little. Her eyes shone like Vega and Spica on a warm summer night. How could he have ever thought her cold? She was quick, hot, full-bursting with verve, passion, imagination. "I want to go too."

"Where is this everybody wants to go?" said a light baritone voice, easy on the surface, yet full of a furious undercurrent. Mervyn Allen was swiftly crossing the room. He swung his great athlete's arms loose from the shoulder, clenching and unclenching his hands. "Where do you want to go?" He addressed Mario. "Hell, is it? Hell it shall be." He rammed his fist forward.

Mario lumbered back, then forward again. Ebery's body was not a fighting machine. It was pulpy, pear-shaped, and in spite of Mario's ascetic life, the

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paunch still gurgled, swung to and fro like a wet sponge. But he fought. He fought with a red ferocity that matched Allen's strength and speed for a half-minute. And then his legs were like columns of pith, his arms could not seem to move. He saw Allen stepping forward, swinging a tremendous massive blow that would crush his jaw like a cardboard box, jar out, shiver his teeth.

Crack! Allen screamed, a wavering falsetto screech, sagged, fell with a gradual slumping motion.

Thane stood looking at the body, holding a pistol.

"That's your brother," gasped Mario, more terrified by Thane's expression than by the fight for life with Allen.

"It's my brother's body. My brother died this morning. Early, at sunrise. Allen had promised he wouldn't let him die, that he would give him a body. . . . And my brother died this morning."

She looked down at the hulk. "When he was young, he was so fine. Now his brain is dead and his body is dead"

She laid the gun on a table "But I've known it would come. I'm sick of it. No more. Now we shall go to the stars. You and I, if you'll take me. What do I care if your body is gross? Your brain is you."

"Allen is dead," said Mario as if in a dream. "There is no one to interfere. The Chateau d'If is ours."

She looked at him doubtfully, lip half-curled. "So?"

"Where is the telescreen?"

THE room suddenly seemed full of people. Mario became aware of the fact with surprise. He had noticed nothing; he had been busy. Now he was finished.

Sitting anesthetized side by side were four old men, staring into space with eyes that later would know the sick anguish of youth and life within reach and lost.

Standing across the room, pale, nervous, quiet, stood Zaer, Breaugh, Janniver. And Ralston Ebery's body. But the body spoke with the fast rush of thought that was Letya Arnold's.

And in Letya Arnold's wasted body, not now conscious, dwelt the mind of Ralston Ebery.

Mario walked in his own body, testing the floor with his own feet, swinging his arms, feeling his face. Thane Paren stood watching him with intent eyes, as if she were seeing light, form, color for the first time, as if Roland Mario were the only thing that life could possibly hold for her.

No one else was in the room. Murris Slade, who had lured, bribed, threatened, frightened those now in the room to the Chateau d'If, had not come farther than the foyer.

Mario addressed Janniver, Zaer, Breaugh. "You three, then, you will take the responsibility?"

They turned on him their wide, amazed eyes, still not fully recovered from the relief, the joy of their own lives. "Yes." . . . "Yes." . . . "Yes."

"Some of the transpositions are beyond help. Some are dead or crazy. There is no help for them. But those whom you can return to their own bodies—to them is your responsibility."

"We break the cursed machine into the smallest pieces possible," said Breaugh. "And the Chateau d'If is only something for whispering, something for old men to dream about."

Mario smiled. "Remember the advertisement? 'Jaded? Bored? Try the Chateau d'If.' "

"I am no longer jaded, no longer bored," sighed Zaer.

"We got our money's worth," said Janniver wryly.

Mario frowned. "Where's Ditmar?"

Thane said, "He has an appointment for ten o'clock tomorrow morning. He comes for the new body he has earned."

Breaugh said with quiet satisfaction, "We shall be here to meet him."

"He will be surprised," said Janniver.

"Why not?" asked Zaer. "After all, this is the Chateau d'If."

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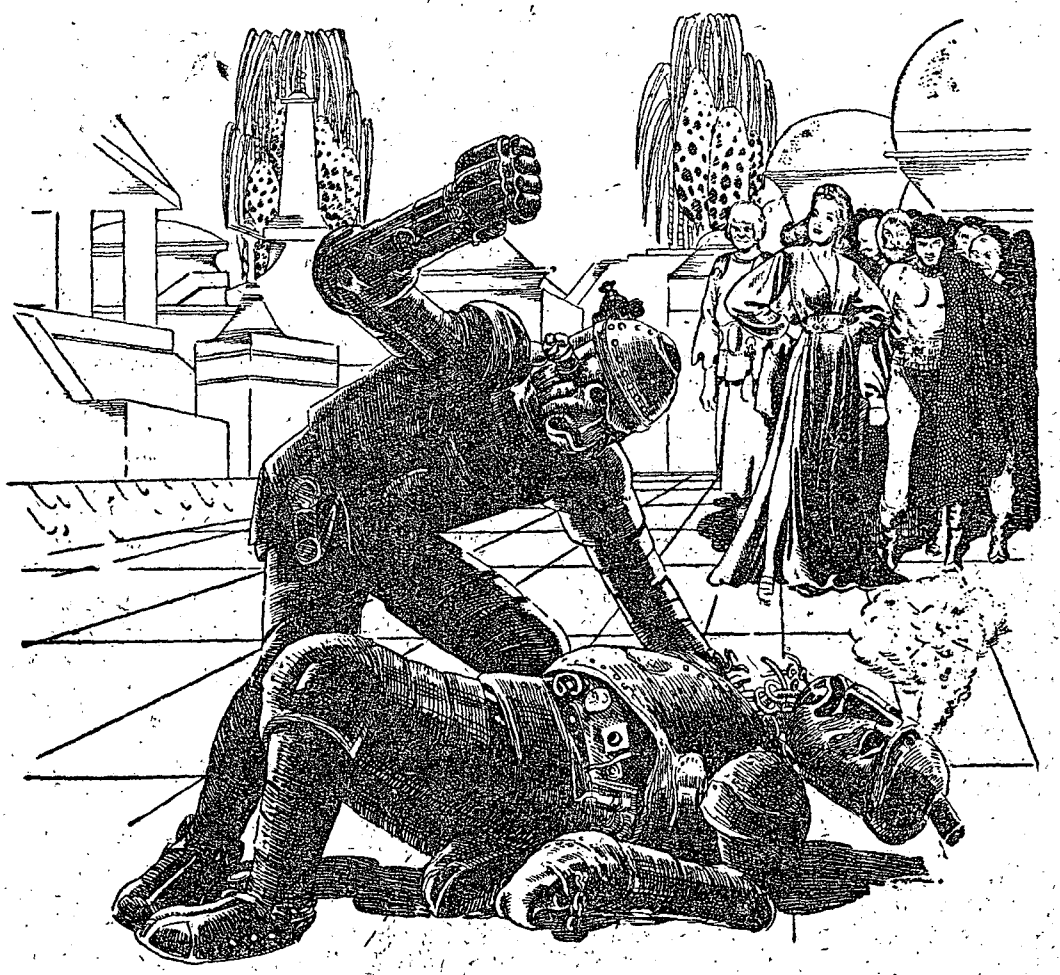

I sailed backwards and hit hard enough to knock my teeth loose

Battling Bolto

Robots ape men, but when a man apes a robot he is asking for plenty of electronic grief!

YOU hear some strange and amusing tales in the Intragalactic Survey; tales of the exiled and the damned. Men foregathered in some inhospitable system two jumps beyond forever from the nearest lighted window and far removed from the ordinary mediums of amusement, depend perforce upon themselves. There arises in every crew some champion teller of tales who, when company

By L. RON HUBBARD

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comes, is put forward by his fellows as a man of value and charm.

One would suppose such stories would be of high danger, sudden demise and new planets won, but this is never the case. The further the crew from its outflung base, the more intimately the yarns concern home.

Wandering around the stars, I have often been the target of "champion tale tellers" and I wish that I had the memory to repeat one hundredth of what we laughed and wept about at the Universe's end. Many of them, I suppose, in less glamorous and vigorous settings, told to men less abused by fates and the outer dark, would prove dull.

But whatever the setting, whatever the audience, I do not think any such charge could ever be leveled at Battling Bolto.

He was a huge ox of a man with a fitting sense of his own gullibility and weaknesses. He came from some system I will not name because he is badly wanted there—a common thing in the Survey or how else would it ever recruit? He was fully seven feet tall and he had all the marks of one who had been raised on a gravity and a half. Earlier in the day, when our crews had boisterously met, he had amused us by manually hammering the dents from our hull, for he was a smith by trade and a smith he remained. His companions, when the fire was burning down, urged him on to tell his tale for us and after much bashful twisting and applications to the jug, the majority prevailed and he began to talk in a mellow roar which I am certain he believed to be quiet and fitting in this lonely, strange-starred night.

I WASN'T cut out to be a rover (he began). It was a woman that did it. (He settled himself, took another drink and grinned into the fire.) I guess I never had much luck in keeping people from coming over me.

Down in Urgo Major, where I was born and raised, folks counted on me to become a pillar of the community and an example to the very young. And I would have if Aimee and the Professor had left my life alone.

Gentlemen, beware of professors. But they ain't a patch on women. I had a shop and I shoed a six-footed beast we had for a living and I mended people's pans and was all set to lead a comfortable and useful life when Aimee got to watching me in church. Pretty soon she was walking me home from church. And then she was expecting me to call Wednesday night. And the first thing I knew, I'd proposed to her. I can't rightly say just how it happened and for two or three weeks afterwards I kept wondering how it was I'd got engaged and to this day I don't recall saying a word about it.

But we were posted up as likely bait for the parson and there I was. She'd come over me.

Wasn't any hurry about the marriage, but then I guess there isn't any hurry about anything down on our planet. Aimee was planning this and that and arranging the house pop left me and everything seemed to be pretty smooth.

And then one day this space ship landed.

Professor Crack McGowan he called himself. And the big banners he hung out said that he sold robots "for every purpose known to man." I figured this was going a little far. But I went down with the boys and we stood around and watched while he put on a show. It wasn't much. He had a robot that clanked around and gave a lecture and he had two men—humans—in the crew that shifted through the crowd handing out literature.

The robots was awful cheap but our planet is pretty poor and he didn't make many sales. And then I found my watch was gone.

Pop had give me that watch and I wasn't going to part with it amiable. I don't get mad very often but I got mad then. We'd been free of crime ever since the carnival came through and I figured it was the little goose-faced character that'd come through with the literature.

So I grabbed him, held him upside

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down in the air with one hand around his ankle and searched him.

I had just found my watch when I felt something hit me that I figured must be part of the planet come loose. I got up and saw I was facing a man from some two-gravity world who had fists like elephants' feet and a face like a handsome ape. So we tangled.

Folks cheered around there and this Professor danced on the outskirts and the town cop held his peace. Chunks of turf as big as your head was flying like confetti and the display stand took on the happy appearance of a junk yard. We had a good time and then this character laid down and quit.

Well, an hour or so later when the doc had brought him around, Mike, our cop, agreed to let me go and I went back to the shop to wash off some blood and pieces of skin and hair. And here was this Professor waiting for me.

"I got a job for you," he says. "I'm partial to brawn and I got a good job. I am Professor Crack McGowan and I own a roaring good business that will let you see the Universe. Now how about it?"

Well, I explained I was happy and content but the more I explained the higher his wages went and pretty soon I hear a cooing voice and there was Aimee. After that all the dealing by-passed me cold and I found out a few days later, when we was sailing along at a couple light years, that I'd been hired on as smith for six earthyears, a third of my pay going back to Aimee to compensate her for the wait. They'd come over me again.

But I didn't know anything yet. The bruiser I'd whipped and the little guy were gone and a couple humanoids helped in their place. I spent all my time back in the workshop turning out robot skins.

I never even had the run of the ship, which was a big one. She was called the *Opportunity* which name, I might add, didn't include me. I knew she had some other workshops but they were always bolted down. She had a couple storerooms and they had things in them which looked like coffins and which I guessed must hold the robots he sold.

I made nothing but metal skins. The Professor would cart them off and that's all I knew about them. And this kept up for about two months of travel until I was sick of looking at my distorted reflection in curved plysteel, my face not being anything too wonderful to begin with.

AND then this Professor comes back and he tells me to start on a new, big skin of a certain design and size of a new metal. I didn't ask any questions. He was sort of a hard man to talk to—little and scrawny and always in a hurry and a lot more glib than I care to meet in my fellow travelers. So I made the skin. Had a little trouble with materials. Kind of face plate he wanted wasn't aboard so I tore up the only space suit.

"Now," he says, when I'm done with it, "put it on."

"Put it on?" I said. "Why?"

So I put it on. He'd come over me again. I sure felt silly. It had joints for all my joints and a visor in the "face" that you could look out of but not into and a goofy helmet on it and when I saw myself in the glass I almost got scared. Gruesome.

"Now," he says, "that's fine. We land in about three hours so you might as well stay dressed."

"Why dressed?" I said.

So I stayed dressed and we landed.

It was a pretty planet, mostly blue grass and orange trees and a sprinkling of humans in the crowd.

Before he opened the port, the Professor said, "Now I want you to go out there and move around and demonstrate things. It's just a joke and we'll take off your helmet at the end of the performance and they'll all laugh. So go outside."

Well, I went outside in this tin suit, feeling like seven kinds of idiot, and clanked around. And the people all looked interested and polite because it was a religious holiday and they didn't have anything else to do anyway and space ships from strange places were unusual

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in these parts. Then the Professor puts up a stand and his two humanoids begin to spread this banner. It read:

BATTLING BOLTO
The Robot Boxing Champion
of the Universe and Sub-dimensions
$10,000 PRIZE TO ANYONE STAYING
WITH HIM TWO ROUNDS!

Well, robots were common enough, even if they were expensive as the dickens and a boxing robot wasn't too much for me to wonder about and so I stood and stared at the space lock waiting for this wonder to appear. And then I felt the Professor's hand on my arm and by golly, I was Battling Bolto! He'd comé over me again.

The hicks stood around and the crowd got bigger and the Professor put on a spiel about his special farm robots and people were real interested.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Professor in a braying voice, "I have planned a little exhibition just to show you how magnificent our product really is. You all know that most robots are delicate, that they have a poor sense of direction, timing and balance, but, gentlemen, this is not true of our product! Battling Bolto will prove to you how superior our products really are."

The humanoids were lining up coffin-like boxes and taking the lids off and a whole line of inert robots were displayed beside the ship.

"Our robots sell for one thousand dollars. One thousand paltry dollars, full price. Ten measly little hundred dollar bills! You can't lose. Our nearest competitor sells this same type robot, of infinitely inferior skill, for twenty-one thousand dollars. Save that middleman profit. Save the manufacturer's squeeze. Save the freight! Buy one of my fine, class A robots, guaranteed forever. . . . Step right up here, young man. What's your name?"

A great big hulk of a kid had been hustled out from town and several of the leading citizens were pushing him ahead.

"Jasper Wilkins," he says.

"Jasper Wilkins!" says the Professor, as though that was the finest name he'd ever heard. "Now, Jasper, are you sure you want to go two rounds with Battling Bolto?"

"He's the country champion!" yelled his backers.

"Yep. Guess I do," said Jasper. And they began to make a ring for us.

Well, I was just coming to life. All of a sudden I was suspicious that the Professor wasn't going to tell anybody about my not being a robot. And I figured that going up against this Jasper Wilkins was pretty unfair. He was bigger'n me but I was wearing plysteel, thirty proof, and I had on gloves that would have gone through a hull. And I was trying to figure out what would happen if I called the Professor down when I felt somebody putting a great big pair of boxing gloves on me. And somebody else was shoving me from behind. And the Professor says sternly, in a monotonous voice, "Bolto, go in and fight, young man. Ugh."

RIGHT about then I started to say my piece, but this young Jasper Wilkins was eager. He let me have one that almost broke my neck and after that things got blurred.

The crowd kept screaming and the face of young Wilkins kept getting in the way of my punches and the ground shook and then there he was, down for the count before the first round was done.

His friends picked him up and the Professor started his talk. I was to hear that talk pretty often.

"Here's five hundred dollars for the young man because of his pluck. Nobody can beat Battling Bolto. But Battling Bolto is only an oversize example of our wares. They are all reliable. They are all deadly. They do your work and fight your battles and slave for you twenty-four hours a day. Unless you have their code, they will not work for you nor move. Now step right up—"

Well, he sold thirty robots. "There's the directions. Take them into a field and practice pitching your voice and

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finally you will have them all at your command. First set their receivers to respond and then master their actions. Don't experiment near a crowd because they may go berserk until you know their management. There you are, sir. Cart away the box."

The humanoids nailed on the lids and handed them out and then we were in the air again.

I waited in the passage behind the control room until the Professor came out.

"I quit," I said. "Take me back where I came from or I'll beat in your skull. I don't play that way and I won't ever again. Now do we understand each other or shall I argue it out in my own way?"

It would have been pretty simple to drive him through the floor with one blow on the top of his head. I wish I had.

"My valiant friend," he said, "look before you leap—or I should say, beware of whom you seek to destroy. I am very much afraid that you were slow in understanding my explanations of your job. I told you all about it and it's in your contract plain as day."

"Just so, put me down where I can get passage home," I said. "You've got plenty of robots. Fix one of them so it can box."

"Alas," said the Professor, "robots are not sufficiently well balanced to follow that manly art."

"But you told those people back there— The robots you sold them are supposed—"

"Alas again, my handy smith, not only do those robots know nothing of boxing, they are woefully ignorant of other things as well."

"But you said—"

"Friend, what I say does not alter the fact that we have just sold thirty empty shells. They do not work, neither do they spin. You made all there is to them. You should know."

"Hey! The galactic police will hear of that!"

"In the years to come. But space is wide, smith, space is wide."

A horrible thought hit me. "Those robots you sold on my own planet—were they—"

"Alas, 'tis true. They were but empty shells. And I fear, smith, that you delivered several yourself just before we left. So I shouldn't think about going home just now."

I was getting hotter than the tin suit made me. "How many did you sell back there?"

"Eighteen, my friend."

"Give me the eighteen thousand and set me down so that I can go home and repay my friends!"

He thought about this for a while and then his face got bright. "Tell you what, smith. If you'll just fight eighteen fights for me, I'll pay you a bonus of a thousand dollars for every fight. Then you can have your wages and go. No one will have seen you. Only your home planet will suspect you and with their money refunded they will think you are at least a hero who has saved the day. That will give you ten thousand in wages, eighteen thousand in—".

"It would take me two years to earn that much in wages," I said. "I won't stay."

"Ah, no. Your wages have just been raised. Now will you go back to your shop and let me to my own work?"

He left me. After a while I went back, took off the robot suit and picked up my hammer. He'd come over me again.

WELL, I hate to tell of the next few months. We were in a close pack of stars and we could make a lot of stops and I sweated in the shop to keep up with the demand. I was ashamed of myself every blow I struck with my hammer but what else could I do? I wasn't going to be an exile forever and a smith that could make eighteen thousand on our planet in half a lifetime hasn't been born, what with the galactic taxes and the tithe to the lord that owns the atomic launching site there. So I squirmed but I worked. And I cussed myself but I fought.

I could weep when I think of the poor country lads I messed up in next few months. Having metal doesn't completely

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protect you. You rattle around in it. And it's sometimes so golblamed hot you could cry. So now and then I'd get jolted so hard I'd get mad and then they'd be a week bringing some kid around.

But I stuck it. I had myself kidded then that I desperately adored this Aimee and I was homesick for my own forge. And I battered away at the fake robots. And the Professor ballyhooed away at the hicks. And I pummeled all comers. And then we hit Mondyke.

Maybe you've heard of Mondyke. It's a big planet, covered with grassland and lakes and no seas and the corn grows about ninety feet high more or less and they've got a monopoly on yeastfood blocks over about five systems. They don't grow any place but Mondyke and they swell up to a ton of food from a two pound chunk, given water. Well, anyway, that's what they told me.

So we landed there because the Professor figured this was a big haul. It was my seventeenth trip but he said that if we sold a hundred robots he'd call it square and I could drop off at the next stop beyond. Well, this suited me fine. I was all set to get back to Aimee and my forge and sextet horseshoes and I was really glad to land and see the initial spiel come off.

The Professor, he really laid the thing on. He let 'em have both barrels. He showed them a lot of electronic tricks and "robot parts" and then he come down to me, Battling Bolto.

Well, I'd never seen him come on it so heavy before. He let loose on the big mob that came out from the town like he was running for galactic tax collector. He promised them everything except heaven. And then he wound it up grand.

It was a beautiful day, the grass all green and a lot of fleecy clouds up above just like our planet and women with picnic baskets and kids running around raising the dickens and men looking wise and explaining electronics to each other in terms that would sure surprise an engineer and the Professor coming down hard about me. I can see it all like it was yesterday.

He had the humanoids in robot skins now and they were passing out literature.

"And Battling Bolto, ladies and gentlemen, is the supreme combat champion in all forms of warfare over anything which may be met in the *entire* universe!" He was safe there. The biggest animal they had on Mondyke was a stork. "And as a gratis demonstration of his skill, ladies and gentlemen, Battling Bolto will guarantee to go two rounds with anything you can bring before him. Anything, ladies and gentlemen. Now, if there is some young man in the crowd who believes himself a master of robots and a terror to mere machines, let him step fearlessly forward now and challenge the title holder of the Universe in all forms of physical combat!"

A couple young bucks began to edge up, husky kids, one of them bigger than me, plenty strong from throwing tractors around. I figured it was going to be an easy fight. And then an old geezer in a straw hat comes up and holds a consultation with the Professor.

"I can't wait long!" said the Professor in a loud voice.

"It won't be long!" said the old geezer. And he goes back to his friends and they roar off in a truck. The Professor had no more'n started to fill in the breech when back they come.

The truck springs give a little and the next thing I knew comes a robot, walking heavy. He was about my height, but he had a lot more beam and head. He was a farm robot and as tough as space beef.

I STARTED to protest but I caught the Professor's eye. This was my chance. And around comes this here robot, walking slow. He give me the creeps and I all of a sudden saw how a lot of other guys had felt.

"This here," said the old geezer for the crowd, "is a thirty-five thousand dollar utility Workster. He can wrassle horses if any durn fool'd let him. And I got me ten thousand dollars on the side that he can lick your chunk of scrap

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metal hands down in two rounds."

"He has the offered prize," said the Professor, sizing up this Workster. It was a new model, a kind that hadn't been in circulation before. And it sure looked like it had good balance.

"Sir," said the Professor, "the side bet is made. Now, ladies and gentlemen, the terror of the Universe, Battling Bolto, will meet his opponent fair and square and no holds barred. And we take no responsibility for damage to anything. So stand clear and make a ring and let the CHAMPEEEEEEN OF THE UNIVERSE *swing!*"

I sure didn't like the looks of this but I stepped in anyway. What else could I do? This was going to be my last fight.

The Workster's eyes kept flashing up and glowing and he creaked and clanked as he got his hinges automatically oiled. He looked pretty awesome, standing there, no soft spot anywhere to be seen. And then the Professor came down with the gloves.

"No you don't," said the old geezer. "This is a barehanded scrap and my robot needs everything he can get. Let's go!"

The crowd backed him and the Professor gave me my phony command and I stepped up, looking cagey, trying to figure out how this here robot would go to it. And then, WHAM! I sailed backwards about twenty feet and hit hard enough to knock my teeth loose.

I got up groggy, listening to the crowd jeer. And this confounded robot was right on top of me, kicking!

I got up and I went down. I got up again, took a couple hard ones that dented my chest and stayed up. I spit out some blood and began to use footwork. And in about two minutes I found that this robot could do everything but dance. He couldn't do that. And it cost him the fight. I could get back of him quicker than he could turn and I hit him until my arms were numb to my neck. And then his head came off.

It made a tinkly sound. Springs whirred out straight. Tubes popped as they blew. And there was an arc and a spiral of blue smoke out of his joints. He stood there, teetering. And then he went down like a pile of scrap metal falling from fifty feet.

"My robot!" wailed the old geezer. "It'll cost ten thousand to put him together."

If he ever finds the parts, I growled, mad.

"Now that this little exhibition has established the superiority of my robots—" began the Professor.

"Wait, wait!" said somebody on the edge of the crowd. And a big truck went off in a tear while a young guy came up and argued with the old geezer. Finally the old guy seemed to agree and they approached the Professor.

"We want another fight," said the old geezer, "and Barney here has got another Robot. If you'd care to make the wager—"

Professor McGowan did. The truck came back and I looked up from where I had been sitting, trying to look like a robot and still catch my breath, to see the most confoundedly big piece of metal I'd seen this side of a war tank.

This robot was not just big. He was a walking horror. He had spikes all over him.

"What is this?" cried the Professor angrily.

"This is an Indestructo dam builder," said the old geezer jumping about. "It works underwater against currents and it drives piles with its fists." He was capering about waving his hat. "You said *anything*. And we forgot all about our engineer corps machines. You'll have

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to fight it. You said you would."

Well, I felt pretty gray. This thing was really a robot. It was a pile driving tank which put logs in place with one hand and drove them in with the other. But it had eyes and was self-animated and had treads. So there we were.

I was about to pull a blown-out fuse trick when I caught a glare from the Professor.

The young guy—and I saw now that he had an engineer uniform on now—was pointing me out carefully to INDESTRUCTO.

"Log. You drive. Log. You drive," he was saying.

"Robot, you fight," the Professor said to me.

THEY made the ring again. The thing's treads sank in the soft grass and he churned at me. He was used to battle currents. Nothing could knock him off his feet. I was already numb from the first fight. But I started in there anyway. What could I do?

Well, I took a swipe at him from the side and he wheeled. I went around and took another swipe and he wheeled again. One hand was pawing out with yard-long fingers, ready to wrap around my body and the other was a natural fist, weighing a couple hundred pounds, ready to come down on me when the fingers connected.

I kept going around back and hitting. It was like trying to knock an anvil in half.

It was such a pleasant day. And the crowd was so pleased. And the hand kept reaching for me and the fist stayed poised.

I wondered how proof I'd made my own head-piece. I began to question my own forge work. And I kept circling, kept hitting futile blows. And the time for the two rounds sped along.

Finally I figured I had my chance. I saw where the skull turret joined the body and I saw that it had some folds of metal to let it go up and down. If I dared get in and up that close I might possibly make one hard blow count. It would be like putting my fist through a half inch of steel, but my fist was steel shod too.

So I dived.

So it caught me.

So the fist came down!

The only thing which kept me alive was busting three of its fingers off. But the hammer hit me a glance on the chest and then I knew no more.

I must have been flung a long way. Something like a billiard ball. And I must have hit the hull of the ship because there was a dent in it. But where I was it was cool and pleasant, out of the sun and there I was content to stay.

Nobody had come near me, and the crowd was wild. I thought they were silly cheering a robot until I got to my elbows and looked between some legs. And there I beheld the strangest sight I ever hope to see.

A ten-foot robot was dancing around INDESTRUCTO like a foosha native around a missionary. My brains were beginning to straighten out a bit now. I had been partly conscious, enough so to hear the clanging steps of something coming out of the ship above me.

Somebody was leaping around watching and holding a sheaf of bills which looked like a bet big enough to buy a star. The Professor was bellowing commands into a funny box and the battle royal was raging.

INDESTRUCTO kept wheeling but the ten-foot giant kept dancing. And every now and then the Professor's robot would dive in and twist another piece of metal out of the engineer ma-

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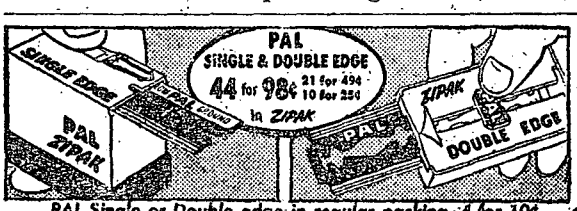

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chine. INDESTRUCTO began to look like he'd been machine-gunned.

Pieces of turf were flying through the air. The place was torn up like it had been plowed. And the whir of those machines was so quiet under the scream of the crowd that it gave me the creeps.

And then the engineer pile driver, the late, lamented INDESTRUCTO, the victor over BATTLING BOLTO, tilted over and went down. One tread spun for a moment and then the ten-foot giant tore it off and threw it away.

The Professor barked new commands. The robot turned and clanged up the ladder and into the ship. The humanoids in their suits began to pass out the boxes. The old geezer sat down and began to mourn about how he'd mortgaged the farm and I lay there and blinked.

After a while I got up and went into the ship. I walked stiff and it wasn't an act.

The last of the boxes were sold. And the Professor was giving his final caution about training the robots in an open field first and some of the purchasers were trying to pry off the lids they'd just seen nailed on and all in all, brothers, it was time to go.

"Sorry I lost," I said to the Professor.

"Why, as for that," that gentleman said, "I expected you would sooner or later. But you gave me a wonderful scheme and I had to have time to build some real robot fighters that I wouldn't be in any risk about. So, my valiant smith, we part."

"Wait a minute," I yelled. "You can't gyp me!"

"Can't I?" he said.

"Those people out there would kill me if they knew. Look here 'Professor' McGowan, I know what you look like and the Galactic Police will be pretty interested in an accurate description of you and your ways. You can't get away with this. I'll make you known to every planet in the whole Universe. I'll see that you're hunted down. I'll—"

"Oh, will you?" he said. And he reached up to his face and he throws a spring catch and there I am staring into a set of wheels and tubes behind the lowered plate. It gave me a terrible turn.

And a voice from one of the staterooms I'd never seen open barked, "Outside with them both!"

I heard a whirr and then a clang and I looked up to see ten feet of giant robot getting set to knock me fifty miles. I back-flipped out through the port and hit in the turf and the MacGowan robot hit beside me with a clang.

The ship's lock closed and I grabbed at its tail. I'd been come over again. It was gone.

The man paused and took a sorrowful drink. And then, on urging, finally resumed his tale.

"What did they do? Heck, what else could they do? There I was, a man posing as a robot with a robot posing as a man. What did they do with me? They sent me into the galactic prison of course, and I worked for a long, long time on those mines.

"What happened to whoever it was that was really in charge? Well, I don't know, to tell the truth. But I have my opinions."

From his jacket he pulled something he must have used as a weapon. "I saved a piece of it and made it up pretty like while I worked in the mines. He'd come over me so many times, it was only fair to come over *him* just once. What is it? Why it's his right steering tube, of course.

"And I drove my fist through the pressure hull for good measure. Came off awful easy. Often wondered where he crashed. Repaired it? How could he? The only space suit aboard the *Opportunity* I used to make Battling Bolto's face plate from, it being the only stuff anywhere in stock. Besides, all the air was out of the ship. You ever seen him in orbit any place, you fellows?"

I told him no because you don't find a ship once it is lost in space. And I asked him was this the reason he was in the Survey now.

"Why no," he said. "Truth to tell, they let me keep my MacGowan robot, so I had a 'manager.' We were on circuit for years after that as Battling Bolto. Selling empty tin skins, of course."

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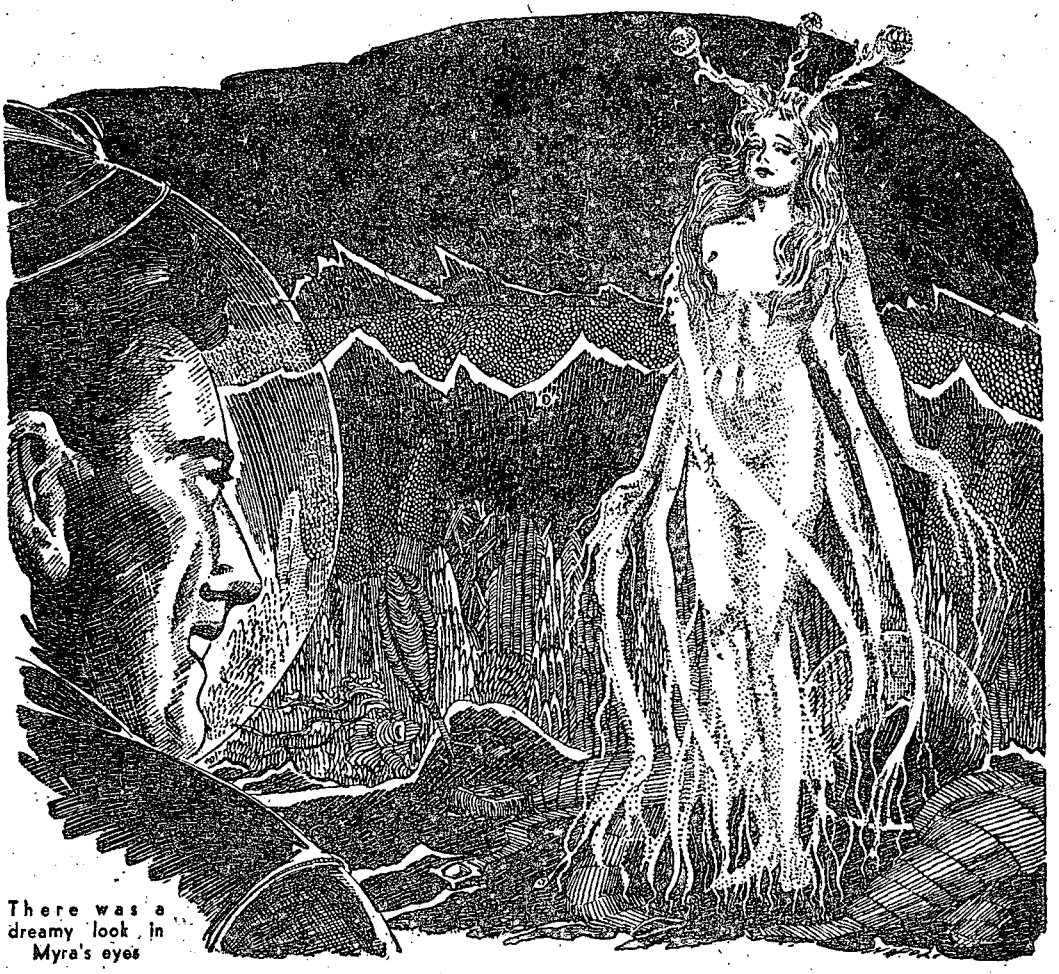

There was a dreamy look in Myra's eyes

SPACEMATE

By WALT SHELDON

All regulations were violated when Jim Beckwith fell for Nurse Myra, but they were both in for a surprise!

PILE-TENDER FIRST CLASS JIM BECKWITH indifferently began reading the bulletin.

FROM: *SPACECOM, S.S.S. Pickering*
TO: *All personnel*
SUBJECT: *Enemy Agent*

Evidence indicates the presence of at least one Sirian aboard and all personnel are cautioned and advised herewith. Said agent or agents are believed to have assumed the form of one or more terrestrials belonging to crew complement. All unusual actions on part of any crew member and/or auxiliary will be reported immediately. Security monitors are referred to Solar Space Force Bulletin No. 20-6988 for full description of

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Sirian characteristics . . .

Jim Beckwith didn't read any further. He placed the bulletin on the bedside table beside his empty lunch tray and the glass with the thermometer in it, raised himself a little and yelled: "Nurse!"

Several others in the sick bay groaned and stirred and sent dirty looks his way. He disregarded them. He propped himself on his elbows and kept his eyes fastened on the door. He lay there like that, listening to the near silence that was made even more awful by the monotonous thrumming of the warp-engines somewhere deep in the bowels of the ship.

He was sick, all right—sick of the *S.S.S. Pickering*. Sick of the curious, hemmed-in feeling one felt in space; sick of the regimented, sterile way of life aboard a cruiser; sick of the whole Sirian War, which had been going on so long that it had become meaningless to both sides.

Hardly anyone except a few dusty-eyed professional historians remembered why the inhabitants of Sol's system and those of the dog star's had started fighting in the first place. Desertion was no longer a heinous crime. It was something you clucked your tongue at, like overstaying leave or keeping Martian salt candy in your quarters.

The nurse came in. It was Myra, as Jim had hoped. He grinned at her and spent the next full second steeped in admiration of her. She was tall and slim as a message rocket. She was blonde. Her nose was just short enough to be saucy and her lips were wide and generous.

With a firmness in her voice that wasn't quite valid, and with the feather touch of a smile at each side of her mouth she said, "All right, Beckwith, what is it now?"

"Nurse," said Jim, "I've got to get out of here. I'm okay. I feel wonderful. If that doc'd just get around and take a look he'd see that. Why don't you get him down here for me?"

"Jim, you know the regulations," she said.

"Regulations! Huh!" Jim snorted.

"Instead of complaining," she said, "you ought to be thankful they're just holding you for observation. The last man here who cut himself on radio active metal had to have an amputation."

"Look," said Jim. He held up his bandaged thumb. "They've Geigered my wound like crazy for the past week. Not a click. Why can't I get out of here? It's driving me nuts."

Instead of answering him, Myra sighed and said, "Your bandage is loose again." She stepped to the bed. "Why can't you keep that hand still, as you're supposed to?"

Jim grinned again. "I'm just not the kind of a guy who can stay still," he said.

She leaned over him, took his hand and began to loosen the bandage for a re-set. He could feel the warmth of her nearness. A light tassel of hair brushed his cheek. There was the soft skin of her cheek, and her shoulders, and the whiteness of her throat in the hanging V-neck of her blouse—

Jim closed his eyes tightly and tried not to tremble.

"What's the matter with you?" came Myra's voice.

He opened his eyes again. She was still close, maddeningly close. He spoke in a low voice so the others in the bay wouldn't hear. "Good gravy, can't you guess, Myra? Don't you know what you do to me?"

"Don't be silly," she said. She finished re-tying his bandage, patted his hand, and gave it back to him again. She straightened and smiled down at him. "You're a nice kid, Jimmy," she said, "and I like you very much. But even so, you know the regulations about spacemen and nurses."

Jim was about to treat the whole concept of regulations with another fine snort. Then he noticed the strange look in her eyes, and instead of saying anything he stared back at her in a puzzled, almost startled way. Her eyes were blue-green, he'd known that for a long time. But for some reason they had now

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a curious, liquid quality that he couldn't quite fathom. They were looking right at him—right through him, he felt—and they seemed at once dull and shiny, if that was possible.

She looked down at him like that for the space of several long heartbeats. And then quite abruptly she turned away, clicked across the room with her magnificent stride and disappeared through the door again.

Jim Beckwith lay propped against his pillow for a long time and thought about that look. He had never seen another woman look quite like that. There was tenderness in that look, and there seemed to be a kind of regret to it, too. Only underneath these very qualities he had sensed something that he could only think of as, well—*hunger*.

One of the men several beds away suddenly switched on his micro-recorder. Muffled music came from it—the mighty, liquid voice of a Venusian crooner. They were the current rage.

"Out there in the void, on an asteroid, with you," it sang.

Jim frowned deeply. He stared straight ahead, seeing nothing. He scratched his cheek. He moistened his upper lip with the tip of his tongue. Then he said softly to himself, "Why not?"

PILE-TENDER First Class Jim Beckwith was released from sick bay the next day. He reported promptly and dutifully to his post, grumbling to himself because he was just in time to stand watch. He stopped in the library on his way to the pile-rooms and took out an armful of reading matter to make the long, silent hours there by the leaden walls more bearable.

He checked the bulletin board in the corridor before entering aft area.

The notice warning against the presence of a Sirian was still there. Tacked to one side of it was the usual daily Progress Report. Except on very secret occasions space personnel were kept informed of the ship's location. As much as anything else it was a morale measure to keep spacemen from going completely mad in the confined, windowless hull. Today the P.R. said:

4 JAN 826 AH. OBS 2200 HRS. MT
RIGHT ASCENSION, 4 HRS. 3 MIN. 12 SEC.
DECLINATION, 26 DEGREES.
DEPARTURE (TERRA) 1.02 PARSECS.

He compared the report with the spacemap beside it, where a tiny red pin marked the last position of the *Pickering*. He frowned for a moment at the indicated orbits of a nearby floater, or small, uninhabited solar system.

His frown was deeper and more thoughtful as he continued aft.

After his watch began he propped his chair to the bulkhead and opened his first bit of reading matter. It was a moderately thick paper-bound booklet with the letters RESTRICTED stamped across the top and the title: SOLAR SPACE FORCE BULLETIN No. 20-6988: KNOW YOUR ENEMY!

He looked first at the photograph of a Sirian which was the frontispiece.

"This is your enemy in his true form!" said the caption.

Jim disregarded the drama of the statement and scowled at the photograph for a long time. A Sirian could not be regarded as attractive, not by the most painful stretch of terrestrial imagination. The scale along the margin of the picture showed the creature to be about seven feet tall. Seven feet if you counted the three eyes that rose on stalks from the whiskery, pinlike head. Three armlike appendages extended from each side of the thoracic region. Wavy filaments, scores of them, came from the body to the ground to support the creature and impart locomotion. The picture was in color. It showed the Sirian to be parti-colored, splotched with extraordinarily revolting areas of sickly green and purple.

"Hm," said Jim thoughtfully. He rubbed his chin. He turned to the first paragraph, and read:

I

GENERAL. The Sirian is a highly intelligent, civilized cosmic being characterized chiefly by its imitative powers,

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and, indeed, compulsions. He can, by a carefully developed technique, assume completely the form of a terrestrial, or for that matter, of any other living being. Although this metamorphosis requires considerable time, effort, and the employment of special apparatus, the return to the original Sirian form is often accomplished in a matter of seconds. The release of enzymes in the Sirian nerve and circulation center—what we would call the brain—is the cause of this reversion to type. It is closely connected with the emotions. (See Section IV: The Pyschology of Your Enemy.) Sirian emotions, and especially the affective emotions, such as love and hate, are quite similar to terrestrial emotions.

It is difficult to recognize a Sirian in earthly form. There are, however, certain indications which can be noted by the acute, alert observer. The Sirian thrives on protein. His hunger and preference for protein substances can be noted in the mess hall, etc. He may pretend to eat vegetables and starches for the sake of appearances, but he will try to obtain large quantities of meat, fish, eggs, or, during space travel on a smaller ship, protein concentrates. It has been reported that a Sirian frequently expresses his protein hunger by a characteristic euphoric look in his eyes, although this has not been experimentally confirmed. Cases of the practise of anthropophagy by Sirians have been reported. However, they seem to consume human beings only in emergencies and when no other protein is available. . . .

Jim looked up from the book and squinted at the wall. He swung his legs idly and rhythmically from the edge of the propped chair.

They could say all they wanted about the Sirians in their fine gobbledygook, but they never really got to the heart of the problem. They didn't understand the salient thing about it. These big brass characters in their nice, safe swivel-chairs back on Terra—what did they know of the mental anguish of fighting an enemy whose agents might turn out to be your own bunkmates, your own pet Martian ape, or commanding officer.

And of course you fought. Sirius was the enemy, and so you fought. Only the causes of the whole blasted war were so ancient, obscure and meaningless that you didn't even have the satisfaction of fighting for something you believed in. The fact was there were colonies in space right now where both terrestrial and Sirian deserters were living together in perfect peace and harmony.

Jim moved his eyes about and looked at the circular, metal walls of the pile room. He listened to the steady, insistent thrum that seemed to find its way to every corner of the ship. He thought of space madness—how every once in a while a spaceman would suddenly start screaming and beat his head against the bulkheads and yell to be let out.

There was no space in space—only oppression and confinement.

There was no sense in going on like this, year after year. For the duration. The duration of man's life according to the way things were going.

Jim swung the legs of the chair forward, slamming them flat on the deck. He walked quickly across the room to his locker on the other side. He took out a calculator, drawing instruments and graph paper. His mind was made up.

Let them fight. Let them war on to eternity. Sirius, Sol—a plague on both their systems.

Jim Beckwith had his own life to live in this universe.

WHEN the trouble developed the *Pickering* headed immediately for the nearest floater. It still had enough power and control to do that. The astrogator made careful calculations of the floater star's temperature and then picked its second planet for a landing place. He measured the distance to the planet of one of its satellites, determined its period of revolution and by dividing the cube of the first factor by the square of the second determined its mass quotient. The gravity scales of all space suits were adjusted accordingly before they were passed out.

During all of this Jim Beckwith went about his duties quietly. Whenever he

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knew that no one was looking he smiled to himself. It had been no great trick for an expert space mechanic like himself to perform mild sabotage on the *Pickering's* power system. The ship would be laid up on this planet for several Omicron Herculis Closure Periods. Three days, at least, Earth time.

He waited, of course, until only several hours before departure to carry out the second part of his scheme.

It was his off-time. He entered the restricted forward area of the ship easily for the simple reason that restrictions had been relaxed and most of the Space Guards were out exploring the planet anyway. It had turned out to be a pleasant world. The atmosphere was too thin to sustain terrestrial life, but it was atmosphere nevertheless, and there were, all about the place, several tiny varieties of mammalian and vegetable life. Principally, XB-186 (II)—as they had named it, and entered it upon the charts—seemed to be a world of rolling green plains and gentle, glassy seas. There was a curious feeling of peace and rest all about the place.

So Jim Beckwith smiled to himself as he went down the corridor that led to the nurse's quarters.

He knocked on Myra's door.

She opened it, and he saw that she was in coveralls and that her blond hair was slightly tousled as though, perhaps, she had been lying down and reading. He swore that she was more beautiful than ever.

"Why, hello there, Jim," she said in her low, pleasant voice. She smiled—a dazzling sunrise of a smile. "How's that thumb coming along?"

Jim's smile was disarming. His manner was respectful. "It's fine, Myra. No trouble at all. But I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you a favor—"

She laughed. "If it doesn't break any regulations, I'll consider it."

"Well, it sort of does, to tell you the truth," he said. "Only not any very big ones. You see, one of my buddies down in the pile rooms just got himself very sick on Martian salt candy, and naturally he doesn't want to go on sick call on account of the punishment. That stuff's strictly tabu, as you know. I told him I'd ask you if you could get hold of the pills to straighten him out."

Myra clucked her tongue in disapproval. But she kept smiling. "All right, Jim," she said, "I'll do it this time. But let's not make this a regular thing. Where is your friend?"

"He's outside," Jim said, arcking his thumb. "Out behind the temporary repair sheds. We'll have to go aft and drop out of one of the emergency hatches. And you'll need your space-suit."

"This begins to get complicated," said Myra, looking at him suspiciously.

"Yes, ma'am," said Jim, guilelessly.

"All right," Myra said. "I'll get a space-suit and the pills and meet you at the compartment bulkhead in about five minutes."

Jim said, "Thanks. That's swell."

And after she had shut the door again he retraced his steps along the corridor. He sang softly to himself: *"Out there in the void, on an asteroid, with you—"*

It took ten minutes instead of five. Jim didn't mind. He knew that women did that sort of thing, and besides, this was the woman he loved.

He led her past all of the engine and pile rooms, carefully avoiding the repair parties, and then helped her through the hatch down to the surface of XB-186 (II). They waddled along in their space-suits toward the temporary repair shed. They circled around behind it. Nobody was there.

"That's funny," Jim said, switching on his communicator. "He was lying right there sick as a dog when I—Wait a minute." He leaned toward the ground. Footprints led away from the shed and up the slope toward a forest of curly dwarf vegetation. Jim, as a matter of fact, had made those footprints only a few hours ago. He straightened. He faced Myra. "Come on, we'd better hurry and catch him before he does anything foolish. He's probably delirious, already."

Myra frowned. "All right. Let's go."

He waited until they were out of sight of the *Pickering* and down in a

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rolling hollow, to boot. They had been tramping along in silence, following the footprints, Jim leading the way. He glanced back at Myra several times and saw the suspicion mounting in her eyes.

He finally stopped, turned, and faced her with a determined air. "Myra," he said, "I love you. I want you more than anything else in the universe. And I'm going to have you—all to myself."

"Jim!" Her golden head had come up fast within the bubble of the space suit. She was staring at him. "Jim Beckwith—you're space mad. You—"

"This won't hurt, Myra," said Jim, smiling. He had drawn his paralyzer-pistol from its holster. He pointed it.

"Jim! Don't!"

HE let her have it.

She was planted there, then, frozen, with one foot still forward and her arm still in the air. He checked his wrist-watch. Be several hours before she came out of it. He nodded. Good. He sat down then, smiled to himself and rocked gently while he waited.

An hour passed. He consulted his watch again, then rose and walked out of the hollow to the top of the rise. He could see the soft ridge that marked the edge of the valley in which the *Pickering* lay.

There was suddenly a howling roar and the ground seemed to shake under his feet. White hot vapor rose in a wide, curling circle from the edges of the distant valley. A great, silvery, pointed nose thrust itself out of the middle of the circle. It seemed to hang, trembling, in mid-air for just a moment. Then there was a blinding instant of flame and the *Pickering* was gone from XB-186 (II), in all probability, forever.

Jim went back into the hollow again. He was smiling broadly, fully. He thrust his face close to the bubble of Myra's space suit and examined the frozen image within it. Even under the effect of the paralyzer she was beautiful. And soon, now, she would come to life again. Jim could wait. Plenty of time. Eternity, in fact, on this planet that would be theirs alone—

He hummed to himself. *Out there in the void, on an asteroid with you—*

When Myra emerged from the effect of the paralyzer, finally, she did so slowly, as though waking from the deepest of sleeps. Jim waited until she had blinked her eyes several times and taken a step or two before he rose and faced her. "Hello, Myra," he said. He stood there quietly.

She swung her eyes toward him. There was a curious, dreamy look in them—a kind of hunger. She didn't say anything. She reached slowly for the vacuum fastener of her space-suit, and snapped it open. She twisted the head bubble and removed it. The halves of the suit came apart and she stepped from it. She did all this very slowly.

Then she was standing there, erect, shoulders thrown back, chin high. The thin atmosphere of the planet affected her not at all. Very evenly and deliberately she said, "You made a mistake, Jim. Out of all the people on the *Pickering* to be marooned with, you picked the wrong one."

She seemed suddenly to concentrate. Her eyebrows pressed toward each other and her skin began to flush darkly. It was changing color—it was becoming splotched purple and green. Her head was shrinking. Three eyes on stalks were beginning to climb from the top of it. Six tentacles were growing from her sides. Wavy filaments were taking the place of her legs. Altogether the transformation took perhaps fifteen seconds, and then she stood before Jim, a perfect Sirian. Only her voice remained the same. "And now, Jim," she said, "I'm sorry—but I'm hungry." The filaments rustled and she moved toward him.

Jim was still smiling. With slow, deliberate movements, such as she had made, he snapped his vacuum lock. He removed his head bubble. He stepped from his own space-suit. He let the emotions within him boil until he could feel the changes in his body. Three eye-stalks began to emerge from his head with a kind of pleasant itch. He moved toward her and said, "Darling!"

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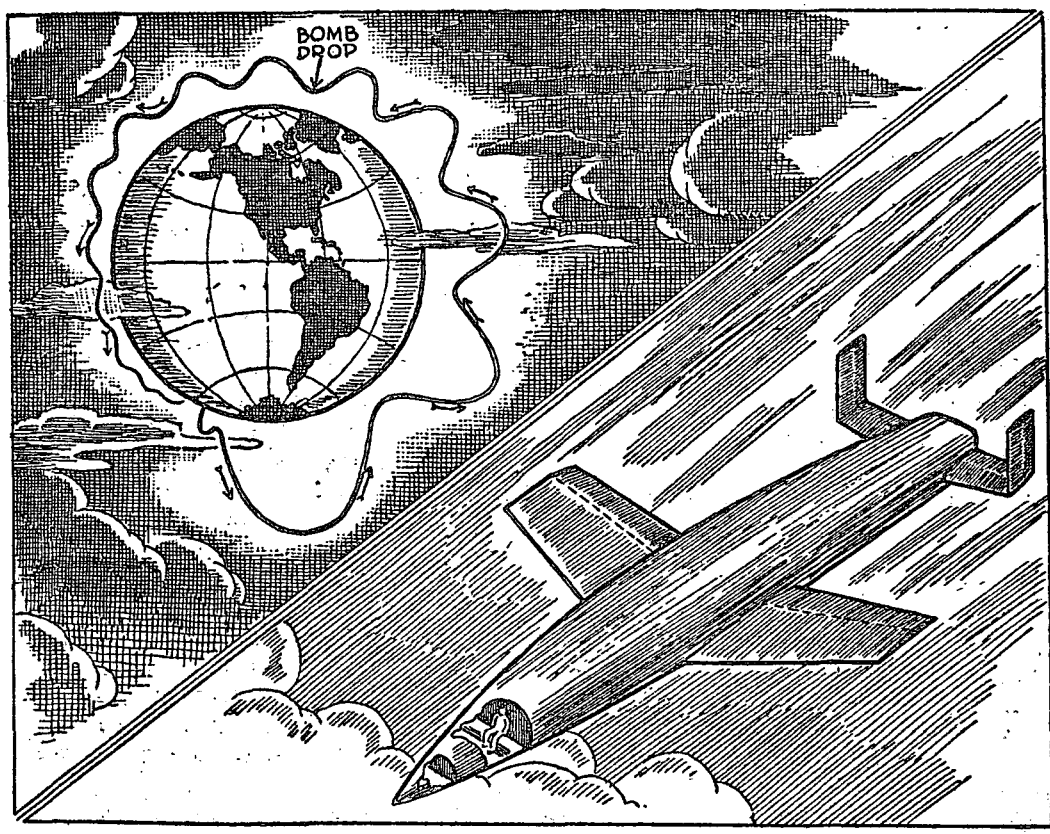

The Round-the-World Bomber

The Nazis did not actually bomb New York, but they DID have their blueprints all drawn up!

I HAVE just finished reading the 400 typewritten pages of a *Top Secret* document, dealing with the design of a high-altitude rocket bomber of unlimited range. As to why I can mention what the document is about, the reason is simple—the classification is German.

On the title page there is an impressive large rubber stamp saying:

> This is a State Secret . . . must be passed personally from hand to hand or if with personal address in double envelope with return receipt. To be shipped by courier if at all possible, in exceptional cases by mail insured for more than 1000 marks.
>
> Any copying, photographing, etc., verboten. To be kept in locked steel safe in rooms which are guarded 24 hours a day. Any neglect of these regulations will be most severely punished.

The American classification of this German document is said to have been *Secret* at first. Then it slid down to *Confidential*. It was completely declassified only a few months ago, without even going through the *Restricted* stage.

A story which I'm going to tell later

A "Top Secret" Feature by WILLY LEY

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in this article may have had something to do with that declassification. There is a total of three stories to be told about that report and the first concerns its two authors, especially its chief author.

The title page of the report merely says, *by E. Sänger and I. Bredt,* but the full names are Dr. Eugen Sänger and Dr. Irene Bredt. Of Miss Bredt I know little more than that she is now in the American Zone of Germany. There she recently published a paper on the use of the Doppler effect for measuring the exhaust velocity of a rocket motor.

Doctor Sänger surprised interested circles for the first time in 1933 when he published a book on rockets, an unusually good book. What was even more unusual at that time, the book was based not only on theory and formulae, but on experimental research.

Doctor Sänger, who had been a professor of aeronautics in the Department of Engineering of the University of Vienna, had run a large number of tests. And, since he was about the only aeronautical engineer among the rocket enthusiasts of that era, he had tried to bring his two fields together and to develop a theory of the rocket airplane.

Among other things he had arrived at the surprising conclusion that a rocket airplane would not surpass comparable propeller aircraft either in range or in load carrying capacity. A rocket airplane, Dr. Sänger wrote, would have about the same range as aircraft of other types. It would carry about the same load but it would fly over a given distance in a fifth or a sixth of the time required by other planes.

Follow Up

A year later he followed this book up with a study on auxiliary rocket motors for aircraft, concentrating on military aircraft, more especially on pursuit planes. Smaller papers, dealing with such details as how to cool a rocket motor, followed from time to time.

Then the Nazis took Austria and Dr. Sänger disappeared. All he could then do was to write me a single and innocuous letter. But it was on his official office stationery so that I would at least know where he was.

When German rocket secrets began to become known near the end of the war I began looking for Sänger's name among them. One just can't help being interested in the doings of old friends and acquaintances, even if it turns out that they wanted to shoot at you long range.

But at first I couldn't find his name attached to anything that had actually been used and a few references in the American press were based on a misunderstanding. In his original book he had published a sketch of what he thought a rocket airplane would look like.

This sketch became known in America because I had used it in my book *Rockets and Space Travel.* Because of a superficial resemblance to the German V-1 some newspapermen believed that the buzz-bomb might be Sänger's work.

But it was purely external resemblance and not a close one at that. In fact our Air Force's XS-1 looks much more like Sänger's sketch than anything built so far.

The New York Rocket

Then came rumors that Sänger had been working on a "rocket" to bomb New York. Just what it was and how far he had progressed remained a mystery. The rocket research institute at Peenemünde, where the V-2 had been created, had also been working on a transatlantic rocket (there may have been more projects of that kind around).

It was to have been a two-step job. A modified V-2 was to have been carried by a booster weighing 85 metric tons at take-off. The upper step (called A-9) was completed if not put into production. The lower step (A-10) was never built.

Sänger's project was entirely different. The A-9 + A-10 job would have been a "straight" rocket, traveling a high-arched trajectory. Sänger did conceive a transatlantic rocket bomber. Whatever he was actually doing along the line of research may not have in-

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terested him too much—at any event it could not have taken all his time. For he wrote the endless report which was later called the *Sänger-Bredt*.

When it was finished one hundred copies were made. Eighty of them were distributed. One went to Prof. Willy Messerschmitt of the airplane company of the same name. One went to General Dornberger, in charge of "new weapons" research, one to Professor Heinkel of Heinkel Aircraft, one to Professor Tank of Focke-Wulf aircraft.

Others were sent to Professor Heisenberg (atomic scientist) in Berlin, to Professor Prandtl of the aerodynamical research center in Vienna and one to Professor Pröll in Hanover, who had filled Professor Prandtl's original job there. Professor Mader of Junkers Aircraft got a copy and so did Professor Dornier of Dornier Aircraft.

Most of these names are known to everybody who is even faintly interested in aircraft research work, but my point for reciting this list is a different one. The eighty copies of the report all went to people of high standing, people who had lots of other things to do.

They were without exception people who, the war having taken the turn it did, had so many things to do that each one of them probably would have liked to split himself at least four ways. No doubt, the report was read but the time required for reading it was all these men had to spare. They did not have opportunity to act upon it.

Postwar Tug of War

Then the war ended and the story of the report moved into another phase. German rocket research had been concentrated in two spots—Peenemünde on the Baltic and Bleicherode in the Harz Mountains.

Peenemünde had been heavily bombed by the RAF and had been "touched up" later several times by the U. S. Eighth Air Force. The Germans, since V-2 was already in production, did not try too hard to maintain it.

And when the Red Army came close they simply moved out in the direction of the advancing American armies in the West. In Peenemünde the Russians found abandoned models, obsolete calculations and a few technicians of the fourth and fifth order.

Angrily, they moved on to Bleicherode, which was also in their zone of occupation. But it had originally been conquered by American troops and when the Russians arrived, according to agreement, the place was empty. Americans are good at moving things long distances fast.

What I just wrote is not wishful thinking. It is taken straight from a Russian source and *not* a Russian source that was meant for publication.

Soviet Gleanings

But the Russians did collect a few things, among them a copy of the *Sänger-Bredt* which had been in the library of a scientist who did not get away in time. From the list of distribution in the back of the report itself the Russians knew that Dr. Wernher von Braun of Peenemünde had received a copy of the report.

They looked for him but he was gone. The American army did not divulge for some time that he was improving his English in New Mexico. The *Sänger-Bredt* was read by Russian scientists and reports about the report were passed on up, to land finally on the desk of Yosif Vissarionovitch Djugashvili, known to history as Stalin.

And Stalin summoned his two military experts on these matters—Colonel Serov and Lieutenant-Colonel Grigory A. Tokáyeff. Also present at the meeting was Vassili Stalin, the top man's only son.

Stalin ordered Serov and Tokáyeff to find Sänger and to bring him to Russia "in a voluntary-compulsory manner." Serov, Tokáyeff and Stalin Junior took off, "looking for Sänger anywhere for months." They also looked for Dr. Bredt "but no trace of her was ever found."

About the time they returned home to Moscow I received a letter from Dr. Sänger, postmarked Paris. He also en-

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closed his latest publication. From that publication—(printed in Switzerland)—the Russians learned that Sänger and a few other Germans were firmly entrenched in a laboratory near Paris.

A little later Tokáyeff grew tired of some things about Russia and found himself a reason for an official trip to London, where he remained, first writing his memoirs for the *Daily Express*. At that time the report was declassified in the United States. It can be bought by anybody, who will reimburse the Library of Congress for the expense of photostating it—$22.80 to be precise.

Dr. Sanger's Report

Now for the report. Doctor Sänger had drawn up the plans for a large rocket airplane and investigated theoretically how such a plane would behave in flight. The idea was that it should first climb at an angle of about 45 degrees. Then, with the motor silent, it would go on up for a while, just like a normal rocket, and finally curve downward.

Now the original idea had been that the wings should flatten out the last part of the trajectory and thereby make the range of this plane longer than that of a rocket of similar size. But then Sänger found something surprising.

When the plane came down to an altitude of 20 miles, where the atmosphere begins to become "air" in our sense of the word, it was moving much too fast to dip in and glide. That could be done at the pilot's whim.

But if the pilot did not choose to do anything about it the plane would "bounce off" the twenty-mile layer and rise again. Then it would fall back and "bounce off" once more. How often this performance was repeated depended essentially on the original speed.

Now this was a method of increasing the range enormously. It was almost precisely similar to the ricochet of a flat stone that is thrown almost parallel to the surface of a body of water. Having established the principle, Sänger could really go to work.

The plane he designed was almost a hundred feet long and was planned to have an empty weight of 20 metric tons. Loaded with fuel and bombs it was to weigh about 100 tons. But that made the take-off extremely wasteful of fuel if not actually impossible. Hence the take-off had to rely on external power.

Sänger designed a take-off track upon which the plane would sit on a kind of sled, which was pushed by a battery of rockets that did not leave the ground. The runway track had to be two miles long. The take-off battery had to work for eleven seconds.

At the end of this time the plane was to be at the end of the runway, moving some 1600 feet per second. Then the plane's own rocket motor was to go into action. Theoretically it would climb to more than a hundred-mile altitude on the first leg of its long roller-coaster journey.

Controlled Ricochets

Supposing that all the fuel had been used up in the first high climb, the first ricochet would take place a little over 2000 miles horizontally from the take-off point. Succeeding ricochets would become gradually smaller, vertically as well as horizontally.

In the end the plane would hit the denser air with comparatively low velocity so that it would not ricochet again but would dive in and begin a long glide. Landing speed would be around 90 miles per hour, which the pilot could easily handle. It would be able to land on any large airport.

All this involved a fantastic amount of mathematical work but was relatively easy to understand in principle. The real difficulty arose when the plane was planned for use as a bomber. At one point it would have to drop its bombs—at one of the low points of its trajectory, just when it was about to ricochet again.

The bomb-dropping was difficult in itself. The bombs would, of course, start out with the velocity the plane had at that moment. That would mean that the bombs themselves would travel 500 miles horizontally before striking the

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ground. Aiming is tough when you have to pull the release trigger 500 miles ahead.

But that was only the smallest part of the problem. The sudden bomb release would make the plane lighter naturally. This meant that all the ricochets after the bomb release would be altered. But it could be calculated by using the new and reduced weight of the plane in the calculation.

That done the question came up of what happened to plane and pilot after the bombs had been dropped. You can't just turn around when you are moving at better than a mile per second.

Tough—But Possible

They did investigate the turn-around. It wasn't completely impossible but it was tough. Many things could go wrong in such an attempt. Besides it would cost enormous amounts of fuel and more fuel would have to be spent at first to carry the extra fuel along.

It was far easier to go straight ahead in order to get out of enemy territory again. Of course there was one very elegant mathematical solution. If one had all the bombers of this type take off from a specific place—say Berlin—the performance would work out very nicely if each plane found its target at about the halfway mark and then landed at precisely the antipodal point of Berlin.

That way, no matter where the target was located, each flight would begin near Berlin and end at the antipodal point, where a base for return flights could be erected. If you travel precisely halfway around the Earth it does not matter whether you go east or west. By the same token the return flight could also be used as a bomb run on any other target city.

The scheme was calculated prettily. But there were a few flaws which could not be changed—geographical flaws. The antipodal point of any place in Germany happens to be in the Australia and New Zealand area.

Even while the mathematical antipodal point was not absolutely necessary, there was no getting away from the fact that British, Australian, New Zealand and very soon American forces would be near it. Nor were all the target cities anywhere near the halfway point of the antipodal flight. Of course it did not matter too much if they were closer to the take-off point.

But they had to be within a few hundred miles of a "low point" of the roller coaster trajectory. They weren't. There was just one instance in which things fitted together with approximate correctness—and that instance was New York. New York could have been bombed from a low point of the trajectory and the bomber could then have gone on either to Japan or at least to a part of the Pacific Ocean still under Japanese domination.

Far-Fetched Logical

There was one more possibility. Why go to the antipodal point? Why not go straight on and return to take-off? That apparently far-fetched idea was the one which worked out most logically. What was required then was just one base. So the report closed with the suggestion of this one-base round-the-world bomber and outlined the steps which research would have to take to arrive at the wanted result.

No wonder that all this made the gentlemen in the Kremlin feel slightly breathless. The way in which the report was written no doubt contributed to this feeling. When Dr. Sänger wrote it he addressed two types of readers

One consisted of the professionals, who would look at a statement like *a storage tank for a million tons of liquid oxygen has an evaporation rate of 29,000 lbs. every 24 hours* and demand to know how that was calculated.

They could only be satisfied with facts, equations and calculations.

The other kind consisted of readers wielding either political or military power. They had to be handed a lucid exposition. And I can well imagine that an intelligent non-scientist, reading all the portions he could read, would be fully convinced. To his mind a scientist

(Concluded on page 140)

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THE WEARIEST RIVER

CHAPTER I

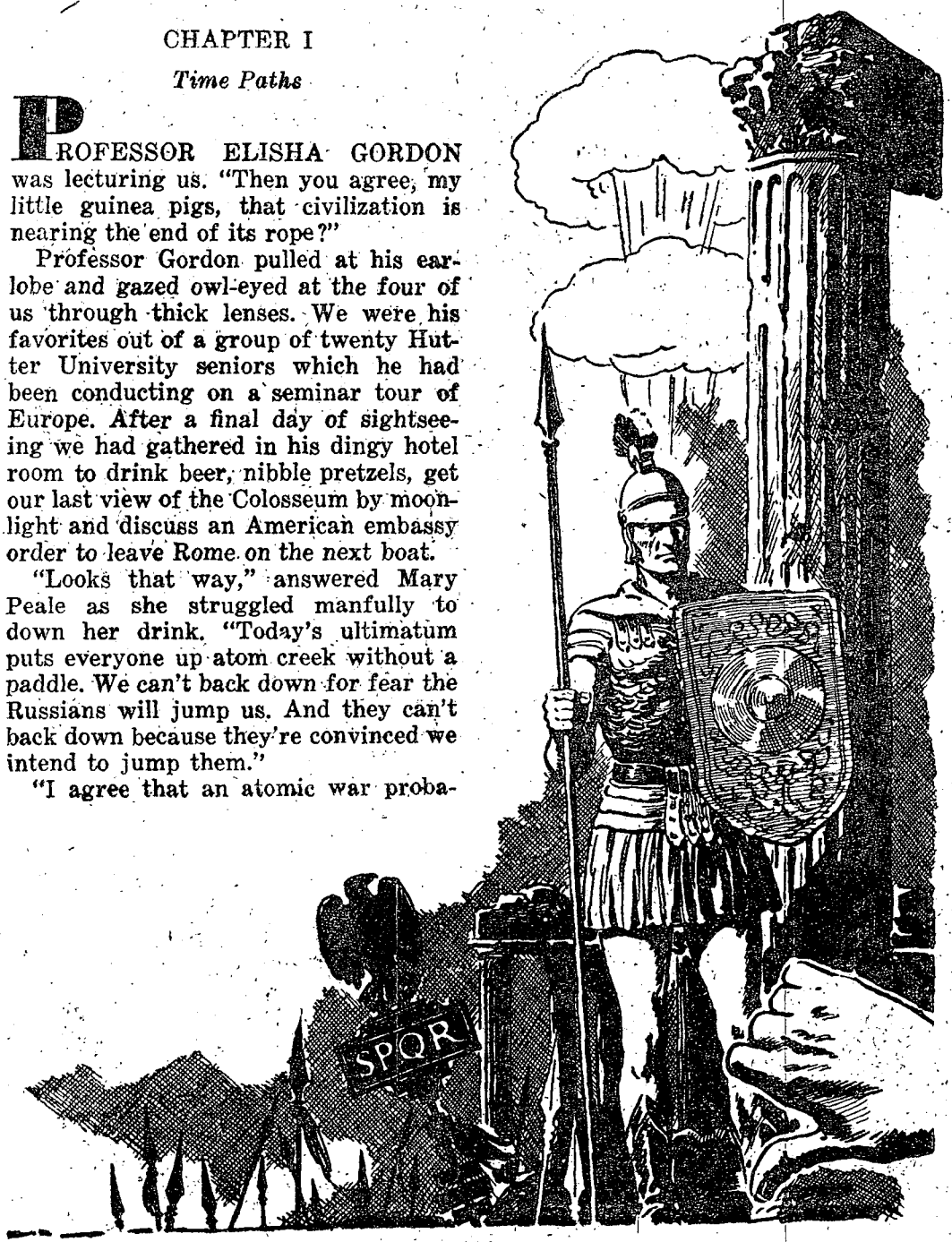
Time Paths

PROFESSOR ELISHA GORDON was lecturing us. "Then you agree, my little guinea pigs, that civilization is nearing the end of its rope?"

Professor Gordon pulled at his earlobe and gazed owl-eyed at the four of us through thick lenses. We were his favorites out of a group of twenty Hutter University seniors which he had been conducting on a seminar tour of Europe. After a final day of sightseeing we had gathered in his dingy hotel room to drink beer, nibble pretzels, get our last view of the Colosseum by moonlight and discuss an American embassy order to leave Rome on the next boat.

"Looks that way," answered Mary Peale as she struggled manfully to down her drink. "Today's ultimatum puts everyone up atom creek without a paddle. We can't back down for fear the Russians will jump us. And they can't back down because they're convinced we intend to jump them."

"I agree that an atomic war proba-



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A NOVELET BY

WALLACE WEST

Professor Elisha Gordon turns time backward for his four prize pupils when the world totters on the brink of ruin!

bly means the end of civilization," said Larry Adams, his blond cowlick tumbling over one eye as he reached for another handful of pretzels. Larry is six feet tall, approximately six inches wide and looks like a pretzel himself. "But there must be some compromise still possible if we could only think of it. Maybe it's not too late to set up some sort of world government."

"We have a world government of sorts," I put in as I poured most of Mary's beer into my empty glass. Why doesn't everyone just relax and give the United Nations a little more time?"

"We don't have any more time, Bill, now that every nation on earth is manufacturing atomic bombs or cooking up bacteriological stews," snapped Hugh Woltman from his seat on the floor at Mary's feet. "We should have started a preventive war when we still had our atomic monopoly."

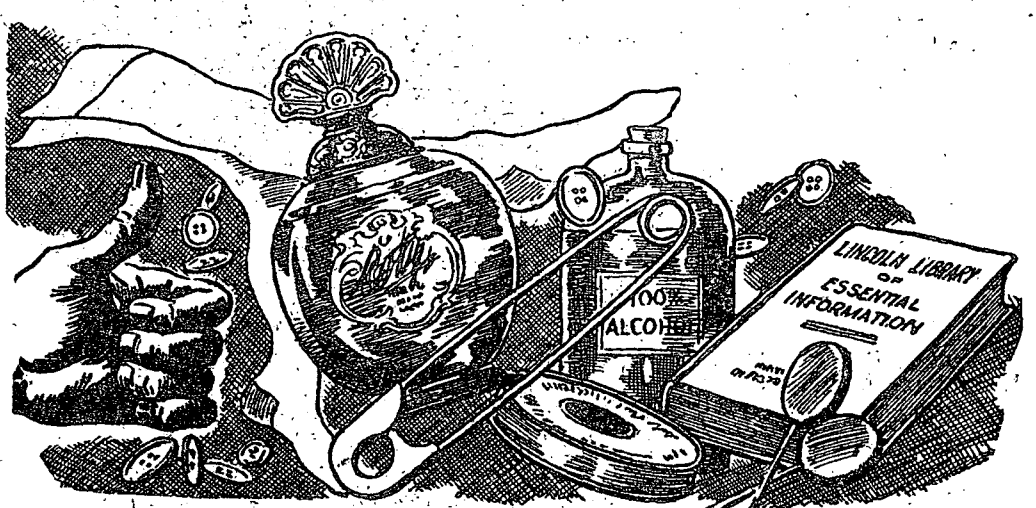
I make it a rule to pay no attention to anything Hugh says, even if he is Hutter's star fullback, and even if he did shoot down twenty zeroes. He's just a square-jawed bone-and-muscle man who takes it for granted that Mary should fall in love with him.

"In other words," Gordon finished his drink and wiped the foam out of his white mustache, "the best brains at Hutter haven't the slightest idea of how to keep the human race from committing suicide."

"And couldn't do a thing about it, even if they did have an idea," said Mary grimly as she jumped to her feet. "We're licked. Let's go pack."

"Sit down, Miss Peale, your syllogism's showing," roared the professor. "We're not licked yet. I have the idea and you four are going to do something about it."

HE glared at us, with the whites showing all around the brown pupils of his eyes, the way he always does when somebody makes a particularly



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stupid remark. I got a funny [illegible]eling in the pit of my stomach, like [illegible]lid once when he hypnotized most of [illegible]he Psychology IV class just by sta[illegible]g at us and twiddling a button on his [illegible]est. I've never quite forgiven him for that stunt. It didn't affect me, but Mary went under so far it took me half an hour and about a gallon of ice water to bring her to.

Gordon was in his best lecture stride now. The pictures on the grimy walls fairly rattled.

"I had hoped," he boomed as he paced the frayed rug, "that the four of you absorbed at least part of what I've been talking about this semester. The rest of the class is just ballast. I'm going to flunk them all—that is, I was going to.

"Tell me, Miss Peale," his bony forefinger shot out, "what is the basic theory set forth in Sheldon and Stevens' 'Varieties of Human Temperament?' Or were you too busy dating Mr. Woltman to read the text?"

"Why—why of course I read it." She blushed to the roots of her black hair and looked prettier than ever. "The theory, which is based on thousands of case studies, is that a man's physique plays an important role in determining his temperament and thought processes."

"Go on, go on!" He shoved his fists into the pockets of his old jacket.

"There are three basic body types, the Viscerotonic—"

"That's me, Bill Lake." I opened a can of beer. "Fond of good food and drink and beautiful girls like Mary. Fat—or at least a trifle plump." I looked down at my bulging waistline. "No fighter, but I do all right as a part time salesman in Dad's haberdashery."

"The Cerebrotonic," she continued, giving me a smile.

"That's where I fit," sighed Larry. "All brains, inhibitions and stomach ulcers. Yon Cassius—on a scholarship."

"And the Somatotonic," Mary concluded. "Strong. Fanatical. Practical. Dangerous as a passel of wildcats when teamed with a Cerebrotonic." She looked down at Hugh with such adoration that it made my toes wiggle. "And women go nuts about 'em."

"Nuts!" said our football hero, grinning all over his face.

"Very well put, Miss Peale." Even the professor had to smile. "You should have added that, thank heaven, there are no pure types. All men and women are mixtures of nine to twelve dominant traits. Mr. Lake is six parts Viscerotonic, two parts Somatotonic—he has enough strength to lift beer to his mouth and to move about quietly if the weather isn't too hot—and four parts Cerebrotonic. Has a good brain but is usually too lazy to use it.

"Mr. Woltman is a two-five-four. Mr. Adams is a two-two-six with two undetermined traits. You, Miss Peale, are almost perfectly balanced—a four-four-four. That's why I've used you as a 'control' in my experiments with constitutional psychology. But go on from there. Have an original thought for once instead of parroting my lectures."

"Well." She spoiled her broad low forehead with a terrific frown. "Maybe the mess the world is in today has come about because the brutal Somatotonics—excuse me, Hugh, but I have to be honest—have ganged up against the other two types. The softening influence of the Viscerotonics, their tolerance and love of life and the clear thinking of the Cerebrotonics have been suppressed in favor of a militant materialism."

"Say!" I crooned. "Maybe you've latched on to something, Mary. We fat fellows have been kicked around for two thousand years. People should put us back in the saddle . . . except that I detest jolting around on a horse."

"I'm afraid you're not the Man-on-Horseback type, Mr. Lake," said Gordon, "but you and Miss Peale are both on the right track. The average human is predominantly Viscerotonic. He has no liking for wars, cold or hot. What he wants is a good job, a pleasant home and a chance to play with his kids after dinner. He has no guilt complexes or suicide compulsions. He loves life. If the world is to have a future, he must act as its balance wheel."

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"Might as well tell a sack of mush to act as a balance wheel," sniped Mary, giving me a queer look. "The Viscerotonic is too lazy to fight for what he really wants."

"Oh, now, Mary," I protested feebly. "You just said we had been ganged up on."

"Mr. Thompson is right in part," ruled the professor. "Viscerotonics are in a bad spot now. But there have been times in the past when they could have changed world history. Can you name one, Mr. Adams?"

"Well," the thin fellow fumbled, "one time might have been when a Cro-Magnon met a Neanderthaler for the first time, and they bashed each other's brains out instead of becoming friends."

"Possibly. But that's merely an hypothesis."

"I got it," I butted in. "Another time was in the days of Julius Caesar."

GORDON'S bug eyes glittered.

"Excellent. Go on, my boy."

"Why look," I gabbled. "It was all in those courses in Latin and in Roman history that you insisted we take last year. In Caesar's day, while Rome was still a republic, there was a sort of balance in the world. You had a predominantly Cerebrotonic civilization centered in Greece. It was highly intellectual and sort of selfless. Spirit-of-the-hive philosophy, you know, but not very realistic.

"Then in Palestine and the East you had the Hebrew and Buddhist viewpoints. They were Viscerotonic because they emphasized the worth of the individual and believed in enjoying life instead of hating it.

"Finally, Rome itself was Somatotonic, which is a synonym for materialistic. Get tough, conquer the world, amass wealth, build roads, aqueducts and public buildings. Why, professor, if those three viewpoints could have been merged into one civilization, instead of fighting each other tooth and toenail, we'd have a heaven on earth today!"

"I always said you had a good brain, my boy."

"'Words! Words! Words!'" Mary quoted with a yawn. "This is good mental exercise, professor, but it doesn't keep the atomic bombs from falling. If we had a Time Machine, then maybe we could remedy matters."

"We have one." Gordon spoke over his shoulder. He was standing at the window now, staring out at the moon-bathed ruins across the square. His bald head was sunk deep between his shoulders. His voice was only a whisper.

We dragged him back to his chair, babbling incoherent questions. We had learned from long experience that, when Gordon made a flat statement, no matter how wild, he spoke the truth.

"You all know that I worked on the atom bomb project during the war," he explained wearily. "I was assigned to study the psychological aspects of its use. Got sacked, finally. The high brass didn't like it when I told them that the whole country might develop a guilt complex if such bombs were dropped. And they said I was crazy when I warned them that widespread use might disrupt the whole space-time continuum."

"Talk English, man," barked Hugh. He was taut as a violin string.

It came to me then that he might have been on that flight over Hiroshima, or perhaps the one over Nagasaki.

"Come, come," frowned the professor. "You certainly haven't forgotten Bartlett's theory of diverging time streams, have you, Mr. Woltman?"

"Of course not. Bartlett cooked up a brainstorm to the effect that, at certain key points in history, mankind has had a choice of futures. At that crucial moment 'There is a tide in the affairs of men,' as old Brutus put it. The race takes one turning at each of those crossroads and that becomes the mainline of history. I can go along that far with Bartlett. But when he says that the other roads—the ones we *didn't* follow—still remain in existence where the-people-we-might-have-been develop different futures than ours, why, I say he's talking arrant tripe!"

"You would say that, being a Somato-

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tonic, but you're wrong, Mr. Woltman. The other roads are still open, if we could only reach them, I believe."

"How, professor?" Larry was shaking his arm in a kind of frenzy.

"Bartlett didn't know, and I only found it out when making some experiments after the test blast in Arizona, that whenever a historic crossroads is reached the space-time continuum is shattered. That is, for a brief period, the past and present co-exist. That may be why there were 'signs and portents in the sky' when Caesar was assassinated, Christ was crucified or William the Conqueror was born. Each of those events may have marked a crossroads.

"And here's another thing Bartlett never discovered." He leaned forward and thrust his goatee at us. "When the continuum cracks, strong men with well-trained minds sometimes can step from one historic climax into another which parallels it in space-time. If I'm not mistaken, such a climax is now rushing upon us."

"You meant—the ultimatum?" As usual, Larry's brilliant mind was the first to grasp his point. "Good gosh!"

"Exactly. Do you think either they or we can wait for that ultimatum to expire tomorrow? It would be suicide. Even now the heavy bombers are on their way, headed for all the key centers of civilization. Listen!"

A far-off air raid siren had started screaming. Another took the demonic ululation of dissonant thirds. A third, fourth and fifth joined it. Rome began howling its terror—shrieking helpless protest against final dissolution.

Gordon didn't move, but his great eyes held ours hypnotically, bored into the very centers of our souls.

"I had hoped to have more time to brief you," he said. "Too late now. Before the bomb drops, focus your minds on the Rome of Caesar's day. I hope that will give you a 'fix' on the past. Of course you may 'land' at some other crisis point. But, whatever period you do reach, try your utmost to switch humanity off the road which leads to this debacle."

"We're not equipped or prepared for such a task," Mary wailed.

THE professor shook his head. He showed no sign of weakening.

"You're better off than you think. You are all well versed in the Latin language and in Roman history. Your modern education will make you supermen in any era of the far past. You are the proper somatypes for the job. And here are a few things which you may, or may not be able to take through with you." He rummaged in a dresser drawer and handed each of us a package.

"What should we try to do back there?" asked Larry.

"Whatever you can do, naturally," he said and glared. "With great good luck, you may be able to prevent Caesar's death. If you do, he may bring about that synthesis of East and West, of Roman and Barbarian civilizations, that he always dreamed of."

"More likely we won't be able to move so much as a stone in the Forum," I yelled above the rising clamor of people running past our door. "The time matrix may be inflexible. But if we do the impossible, won't it spell the doom of every man alive today, just as certainly as will the explosion of the bomb? If Caesar lives, I mean, there'll be no Roman Civil War; maybe no Dark Ages or World Wars. People who have been killed will remain alive. Marriages will be different. Life spans may change. We'll never have been born, so how can we possibly go back now?"

"The old time travel paradox," he nodded. "We of this generation may vanish like smoke. But the human race may have a chance to survive."

Above the siren wails we began to hear the roar of bombers and the crump of anti-aircraft guns.

"Into the park," Gordon ordered. "Lie in the gutter, away from the buildings. Keep your thoughts fixed on ancient Rome. It's mankind's slim last hope. Out! Out!" He was shoving us toward the door.

"What about you?" sobbed Mary. "Aren't you coming?"

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"I'm too old for time traveling," he answered calmly as he picked his favorite volume of Plato off a table beside the sagging bed. "Besides, I'm curious as to what will happen here. Good night, children."

He closed the door in our faces.

CHAPTER II

Back Into the Past

WE heard the first bomb coming as we scrabbled for places among the orange peels and miscellaneous offal of the Roman gutter.

Then the air began to quiver in an eerie way and the light from the moon seemed to whiten and thicken like buttermilk. Something burst!

The light was still there when I recovered consciousness. I pried my cramped arms from about my head, sat up and opened one eye experimentally. Rome was still there too, dozing under a brilliant sun. But there had been some changes made. The ruins of the colosseum had been replaced by row on row of dingy tenements. Our hotel had miraculously changed into a temple. Only the layout of a few streets was recognizable. And over everything lay a pall of silence so deep that it made my flesh crawl.

I shook my companions back to consciousness and we took stock of the situation. None of us had been injured but our clothes were a sorry mess.

"Must be a bank holiday," said Larry after dunking his head in a nearby fountain. "Not a soul on the streets."

"I don't like it," said Hugh. "Reminds me of the day the Japs played doggo until we were right over the center of Rabaul and then let go with everything they had at once."

"It's mid-morning," said Mary. "If this really is the Ides of March we ought to go to the Senate right away. Caesar was due there hours ago."

Luckily we remembered the maps in the history textbooks well enough to find our own way, for we met nobody to direct us. The new white marble Senate House was equally deserted. We climbed the broad steps unmolested and entered to find the Senate Chamber empty too.

Well, not quite empty! A big white cat, its fur splotched with red, dashed squalling between our legs as we crossed the threshold.

And, when we forced ourselves to approach the tribune, we found what we had feared—Caesar's body lying there unattended, still dripping blood from more than two score dagger wounds!

"'And none so poor to do him reverence,'" whispered Mary, her eyes filling with tears as she looked down at the forlorn world conqueror. "Suetonius told the truth. All Caesar's friends deserted him, left him lying here for hours, in the Senate House he had built."

"What's our next move?" Hugh, having seen death so often, was hardly shaken. "Seems to me this marks the failure of a mission. Old Gordon should be told that, when you swap crises, you may reach the first one *after* it has occurred. Now we're stuck here, with no chance of escape or of changing the time stream either."

"Quitter!" Larry was angry for the first time I could remember. "Look. This particular crisis lasts for two years—until the republicans are licked by a technical knockout at the Battle of Philippi. You remember how it happens. Cassius is near-sighted. At a crucial moment in the fighting he mistakes his own troops for those of Octavian, thinks he's about to be captured and commits suicide."

"*Hum.*" Hugh lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully. "Well, if things hung in the balance that way, I'll bet a man who understands modern battle practice—a man like me—could still change the decision."

"Fancy yourself, don't you?" Larry relaxed a bit. "But here's another point. Granted you enable Brutus and Cassius to win at Philippi or before . . . that would put the Republicans in the saddle, wouldn't it?"

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"Of course. That's what we want, isn't it? Republicans. Democracy. Freedom. Peace. All that guff?"

"I'm not so sure." Larry was pacing the tribune now, making a little detour every time he passed the corpse. "The conspirators *claim* to be republicans. But look what they did to Caesar—ganged up when he was unarmed and stabbed him in the back. That's a trick worthy of Mussolini. My hunch is they plan to set up a ruthless dictatorship and tell the dear people to go chase themselves."

"I'll go along with you so far as Cassius is concerned," said Mary as she bent down to close the dead man's great accusing eyes. "Cassius is an unprincipled, ambitious mixture of Cerebrotonic and Somatotonic. But everything indicates that Brutus was a pretty decent Visceratonic. Caesar trusted him. Remember what he said: 'Let me have men about me who are fat.'"

"My eye!" I blurted out. "Sure, Brutus was fat, but for my money he and Cassius are birds of a feather. What everyone forgets is that Portia had a notion her husband was ailing and had to be pampered. She was always stuffing him with noodles and such. The fact that he overate wouldn't change his basic psychology. He was—I mean he *is*—a bad egg, for all his fine phrases."

IT was a puzzling situation. None of us knew what to do.

"Then who *can* we turn to?" Mary asked helplessly.

"How about Cicero?" suggested Larry. "He didn't take part in the assassination plot. He's vain, but his speeches prove he's a real republican."

"Maybe," she sighed. "But in the meantime what do we do about Caesar's body?"

"Leave it alone," I said quickly. "If we value our hides, we'll beat it out of here while we still have a chance. Suetonius says three slaves will come along presently and carry him home."

"I've a better idea." Hugh's eyes were sparkling. "Let's put the body on Cassius' porch and start yelling bloody murder. That will pin the crime right where it belongs. We'll raise a mob in no time."

"No," said Larry. "We'll take the body to Cicero; tell him Caesar asked to be taken there with his last breath. That will smoke the old fellow out, make him take a stand instead of letting Brutus and Cassius get the bit in their teeth. Besides, we're dressed in funny clothes. Our Latin probably smells. We don't really know how the words are pronounced in these times. If we stick our necks out the way Hugh wants, we'll surely wind up by getting ourselves crucified."

We took a vote on it. Then we put what was left of mighty Caesar on a shield which some terrified guard had dropped behind the tribune. We shouldered it, picked up those parcels Gordon had given us and started out in search of Cicero's villa.

Of course we got ourselves hopelessly lost in that maze of deserted, whispering streets which led to the Palatine Hill. And there was nobody to ask directions of. We felt thousands of terrified eyes peering at us through tightly drawn curtains, but even the Vigiles had left their beats that wild March morning. Rome lay naked and defenseless.

Finally Hugh did manage to corner an old woman in a blind alley. When he asked the way to Cicero's house—he pronounced the name "Kickero," as we had been taught in Latin class—he was met by a blank stare.

He resorted to sign language at last, pantomiming that he wanted to find the villa of an important, loudspeaking fat man with a big bald head. That helped. Eventually we staggered up through a grove of dust-colored olive trees to the marble portals of an imposing mansion.

We met a bald fat man coming out. He evidently had been going someplace in a great hurry until he saw what we were carrying and sort of caved in on himself. But he didn't look the least bit like the big-nosed busts of Cicero that I remembered having seen in classroom niches.

Hugh took the lead as usual. Step-

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ping forward boldly, right arm upraised, he thundered:

"Kickero, we bear Caesar's basely murdered body!"

My heart sank into my shoes. Even if Cicero wasn't in the plot, he still was friendly with the conspirators. We were in a bad fix.

"Kickero?" floundered the fat man. "You must mean Cicero. Why seek ye that honey-tongued villain here?"

"Well." It was Hugh's turn to flounder, but he recovered handsomely. "We thought—we were told that Cicero lived here. As friends of Caesar's, we came to accuse him of the crime to his face."

"That was a brave deed. But I am Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, no friend of demagogues and assassins." He was shaking like a leaf but he knelt beside the corpse and pressed his full lips against the high, cold forehead. That took real courage, on a day when Caesar's enemies were riding high.

"So the jackals have brought the lion down," he said, rising at last. "I just heard there had been rioting in the Senate House. I was on my way to offer aid. You say Cicero did this thing?"

Halting over the sonorous Latin phrases, we did our best to set him straight.

"Ignoble!" he muttered when we had finished as he dried his eyes on the hem of his toga. "And who are you? Dressed and talking so strangely, yet daring the wrath of Cassius, Brutus and Cicero?"

We looked at each other helplessly for a moment. Then Larry spoke up:

"We are strangers from Gaul," he lied, "come to offer our services to Caesar in his war against Parthia. We crave pardon for our bad Latin and barbarous garb."

"Strange." Lepidus studied us, frowning. "I thought I knew all the accents of Gaul, and all its costumes too. And tell me"—his warm brown eyes took their time surveying Mary's trim figure in its scanty white dress—"have you too come to fight for Caesar?"

"I came to *serve* Caesar." She returned his gaze levelly. "Since he is dead I know not whom to serve."

HIS plump cheeks reddened as though she had slapped them. "Pardon! I meant no disrespect. It is only that Roman ladies do not—do not—" He pulled himself together. "Come. We are all friends since you serve Caesar. Let us to his home and break the word to Calpurnia. Afterwards, you shall be my guests for so long as you care to stay."

"Is he *the* Lepidus?" I whispered to Larry as our host's slaves picked up the bloody shield and bore Caesar, one arm swinging limply, into the streets again. "The man who was both a soldier and a High Priest?"

"The same. Also the weak sister that Mark Antony and Octavian gave the runaround to after the three of them formed the Second Triumvirate and defeated the republicans."

"I'm not so sure he's weak, Larry. He's strongly Visceratonic. No doubt about that. But he's a good soldier, with a fine record as governor in Spain. Maybe . . ."

"Maybe!" He nodded thoughtfully as we trailed after the cortege.

We managed to calm Calpurnia's hysterics after an hour or so and were returning to Lepidus' home when we encountered a startling procession.

Surrounded five deep by glistening Nubian warriors, a woman was being hurried through the streets in a litter draped with silks of clashing, barbaric colors. By her side rode an armored Roman on a black charger.

"Must be some friend of Caesar heading for the tall timber," I said to Hugh.

He didn't answer—just stood stock still and stared. And well he might! She was a golden woman, proudly naked to the waist in the Egyptian fashion which was frowned on in Rome. Her lovely neck and arms were unadorned but her wealth of dusky auburn hair was surmounted by the heavily jeweled lotus crown of Isis. She was staring straight ahead, the fear of death—and the contempt of it—stamped large on her breathtaking oval face.

"Cleopatra!" Bill choked. "But that's impossible."

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"No, it isn't," I corrected him. "Cleopatra made a visit of state to Rome in the spring of forty-four B.C. Created quite a scandal, too. As I recall it, the populace suspected her of being Ciscero's mistress."

"Who's the big lug on the horse?" Hugh's eyes were feral slits.

At that moment the "big lug" recognized Lepidus and spurred toward him.

"Marcus Aemilius," he bellowed, "I didn't think to meet you in the streets today. Do you think it wise to be abroad?"

"Much wiser than for you to be escorting the Queen of Egypt to her ship, Marcus Antonius." Lepidus puffed forward and kissed the slim hand which Cleopatra extended. "The mobs will be out any hour now."

"I have arranged a truce, until after the funeral." Then, spying the four of us. "Who are these outlanders?"

"Friends of Caesar's. I met them carrying his body from the Senate."

"Oh." Mark Antony's straight black brows drew together and his matinee idol face flushed. "I had hoped to have that honor, but Brutus was urgent." He snarled, then, showing a mouthful of white buck teeth: "I had to grovel before those assasins to save our lives. But I outwitted them. Brutus agreed to let me speak at the funeral—after he has spoken, of course. Hah! I had feared he would ask Cicero to make the oration. Brutus is no Cicero!"

"Not so loud, boy. Do you want us all massacred?" To break the tension Lepidus turned to Cleopatra. "May the gods give Your Majesty a pleasant voyage home."

"Cleopatra will have no more pleasant voyages," she answered with a voice like a viol. "Her Caesar is dead." She signed languidly for the Nubians to resume their march, then leaned back against the cushions and closed those disturbing golden eyes.

"What a woman, what a woman!" Hugh muttered as we watched her go.

"Take it easy," I grinned. "She's Antony's, I seem to remember."

"Not yet, Bill." Abstractedly he pulled out a cigarette and started to light it. I knocked the match out of his hand. This was no time for tricks of magic.

WE held a counsel of war that evening in the guest house which friend Lepidus maintained in a corner of his tiny walled garden. By this time we had bathed, dined, rested for several hours and changed into Roman dress. A tunic does something for a plump figure, I had to admit. A toga, with its voluminous folds, would have been better but, not being a citizen, that was denied me.

"We're all set," Larry began. "We're in the middle of things now that we have become 'clients' of Lepidus. Also, we know what's going to happen at the funeral tomorrow."

"Maybe our interference already has changed the course of events," suggested Mary as she studied her flowing costume with disfavor in a bronze mirror and struggled with its clumsy fastenings.

"I doubt it," I disagreed. "But we'll have to be mighty careful from now on. For example, if we should do something to make Antony flub his oration at the funeral, there may be no battle of Philippi. We ought to study the whole situation before we make another move."

"Hah!" snorted Hugh. He was playing with a jeweled dagger instead of giving the usual attention to Mary.

"What did you say?" She looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"Nothing. I was just thinking."

"We're in the same position as the man whose fairy godmother granted him one wish," said Larry. "If he doesn't wish for the right thing, he's sunk."

"Well, what *do* we wish for?" Mary wanted to know. "Don't forget that our freedom of action becomes more limited with every minute we hesitate. Already we seem to have joined forces with Lepidus and his crowd. Is that really what we want to do?"

"Maybe we can build up Lepidus as

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against Antony and even as against Octavian, Caesar's heir, when he arrives in Rome," I hazarded. "Both of those men have too much Somatotonia for my taste."

"Rot!" said Hugh, who was staring through the open door in the direction of Egypt.

"All right, then. Look at it from the other direction. Say we decide to change sides and team up with the republicans. What have they got? Three Cerebrotonics, Cassius, Brutus and Cicero, as leaders. No temperamental balance there at all. They'll make a real mess of things if they come out on top."

"Maybe we could consolidate the two factions," Larry, the eternal compromiser, suggested. "That would balance the temperaments okay. But how are we going to do anything as big as that before Antony stirs up the mob and makes a common front impossible? Looks utterly hopeless."

"Aren't we forgetting something?" Mary cried. "I mean those packages that Prof. Gordon gave us. Perhaps they will help us."

"Good idea," said Larry. "What's in yours?"

CHAPTER III

New History

SHE broke the cords, removed the wrappings, opened a brightly tinted cardboard box, then sank onto a couch and began to giggle.

"Well?"

"A huge bottle of Chanel Number Five perfume," she enumerated. "Twelve pairs of nylon hose. A complete makeup kit. And—and some black silk underthings. Why on earth?"

Hugh paraphrased:

"'Daily she went about the Roman city,
Black underclothes of crepe de chine she wore,
So that, in each back yard, she viewed with pity
The short and simple flannels of the poor.'

"That is, providing ancient Romans wear flannels," he added between shouts of laughter. "The old goat!"

"Now Hugh!" She blushed scarlet. "The professor must have had a good reason for giving me this. Larry, what did you receive?"

"A Lincoln Library of Essential Information," he chortled after the wrappings were off. "That's more like it. Bet I could almost reconstruct modern civilization with a one-volume encyclodepia like this."

"*If* you had the materials, the machine tools and the workers with know-how." Hugh flapped his hand grandly. "Hero of Alexandria invented the steam engine two centuries ago, but just try to get Roman slave labor to build a big one for you."

"Smart guy." Larry was miffed. "Why don't you open your gift?"

"I already did. It contained about a thousand dollars' worth of gold bars, a biography of P. T. Barnum and a—"

"And a what, Hugh?" Mary asked.

"Huh? Oh, nothing else. Guess I came out ahead of the game at that. Wonder where Gordon raked up the dough to buy that much gold. And why did he put in that idiotic book. For padding or something?"

They all looked as I fumbled with my big oblong box. I got it open—and held up a gallon bottle marked *pure grain alcohol.*

"Think we ought to wake up Marcus Aemilius and sell him on our consolidated idea?" asked Larry when we had recovered our breaths. "What do you say, treasurer?"

"You three go," yawned the big fellow. "I'm no good at that sort of thing. I got started reading about Barnum's Cardiff Giant hoax a while ago. Think I'll finish the chapter and turn in."

Lepidus wasn't asleep after all. We found him sitting, unattended, in his office or tablinum, staring glumly at the frescoed wall. Trouble with Marcus Aemilius was that he was an honest man surrounded by power-hungry adventurers. He was just as worried as we were about the way things were shaping up.

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This time we told him our story straight. Then we made a few minor miracles with matches, cigarettes, wrist watches and coins to convince him that we spoke the truth. Finally we did a little soothsaying on the double cross which Antony and Octavian would plan after the three of them set up the Triumvirate and presented our big idea.

Lepidus wasn't hard to convince. Although a soldier, he was essentially a man of peace who thought only of Rome's good. Yes, he certainly would get Antony to tone down his funeral oration. In the morning of course. No Roman who valued his hide would venture into those black, unguarded streets where he stood an equal chance of being knifed by a robber or being run down by the great horse-drawn vans which carried food, bricks and other materials in from the country at night.

Yes, he'd even agree to have a heart-to-heart talk with his old enemy, Cicero —in the morning, again.

We left it at that, perforce, and returned to the guest house.

When we got there, Hugh—and his gift package—had vanished!

I must say for poor Lepidus that he did his best. Through a blinding rain and wind storm which had arisen during the night, he had himself lugged over to Antony's at dawn—the First Hour, as Romans reckon time. He was told that that Great Man was writing a masterpiece and could not be disturbed.

We saw his water-soaked litter return and then head up the hill to Cicero's villa. There he was informed that that Great Man had been so overcome with grief at Caesar's death that he had left for his country place at Arpinum.

By then it was time for us to breakfast and go to the Forum. Romans keep ungodly early hours. We had a hard time getting there, too. Despite the bad weather the streets were as jammed as they had been deserted the previous day.

The crowds were composed almost entirely of men, either common citizens in dingy togas or freedmen in tall red hats and worn cloaks. All were in an ugly mood which kept the resurrected vigiles on their toes. Some of the plebeians were armed with staves. Others had suspicious bulges under their clothes.

Several times we saw fights break out in the narrow, littered streets. Once a group of republicans recognized Lepidus. They were held at bay when his guard of Lictors drew their short swords.

"The only thing that saves us is that the mob hasn't yet made up its mind which side to support," said our patron as we edged our way past cement walls and public buildings scribbled over with vile slogans attacking both republicans and Caesarites. "I do hope Marcus Antonius knows what he is about." He dabbed at his round face.

BRUTUS already had begun his address as we reached our assigned places just under the marble balcony of the Rostrum. He was an innocent-looking block of man with the pink complexion which signals high blood pressure, and he was dressed in a woolen toga bleached white as snow.

"Who is here so base that would be a bondman?" Brutus was thundering. "If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him I have offended. I pause for a reply."

"None, Brutus, none," whooped the enthralled crowd, but Lepidus whispered in my ear:

"He really had offended many by wearing that bleached toga. It is the 'candidatus' and indicates that he is seeking public office. It would have been better taste to wear black or even the usual unbleached wool."

"With this I depart," Brutus concluded quietly, "that, as I slew my best friend for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death."

He stepped down from the rostrum with the crowd—and the government of Rome—in his pocket. His listeners went wild with enthusiasm.

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"Live, Brutus! Live!" they screamed until great flocks of pigeons, frightened by the noise, whirred round and round.

Then, in the midst of the uproar, came Antony, head bowed and dressed in somber black, escorting Caesar's body.

His staging was perfection itself: The hysterical mob. The empty rostrum. The pause. The corpse itself, still in its blood-stained mantle and unaccompanied by the traditional group of friends, relatives and wailing hired mourners. Deathlike quiet spread, in slow waves, over the Forum.

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen," he began in that deep bass of his, "lend me your ears. I come to—"

AN object fell out of the sky, then. It struck the edge of the rostrum, burst asunder and scattered particles in all directions.

"What? Where? How?" Antony lost his audience as people nearby bent to see what had fallen amongst them and those farther away craned their necks.

"An ear! Why, they are ass's ears, fallen from heaven," cried someone. The shout was taken up to the confines of the square. It was followed by ominous murmurs. "An augury! Does it mean that Romans are asses to listen to this big oaf? Made love to Cleopatra, they say—Right under Caesar's nose. Yes, and the 'smoke' is that he wants to be Emperor in Caesar's stead."

"You gentle Romans!" Antony had to shout to get attention. "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them."

"Shame! Shame!" A giant's voice roared from among the columns of the Temple of Concord just behind the speaker. "Shame, to speak evil of the dead. Yesterday you fawned on Caesar's assassins to save your worthless skin. Now you clasp their bloody hands in friendship!"

"It's Hugh, the crazy fool!" Mary gripped my arm. "He tossed that bag full of bloody ears with some sort of catapult. Now he's using a megaphone from inside the temple. What on earth is he up to?"

I shook my head. The mob yelled, surged and shook its collective fist at the man in black.

I still think Antony could have won out if he had stormed into the temple and dragged his accuser forth. Instead he became as flustered as a ham actor who has missed his cue.

"The good is oft interred with their bones," he bulled ahead with his memorized masterpiece. "So let it be with Caesar."

Nobody was listening now. The Romans had decided, instantaneously, that the speaker was a villain and they were in a lynching mood. They surged forward, to recoil, momentarily, only when Lictors stationed around the rostrum began swinging their swords and flailing with their fasces.

"We must fly," Lepidus was panting. "This means death for all of us!"

"Wait!" I grabbed his arm. "Listen!" Above the uproar I had caught the unmistakable sound which only marching men can make. "The Marines are coming!"

Into the Forum, striding ten abreast and heading toward the rostrum, came a fully armed Cohort of Legionaries. They parted the screaming mob as the prow of a ship parts waves.

At the head of his troops, flanked on one side by the glittering Roman eagle and on the other by an S.P.Q.R. standard, rode a young man in the regalia of a full general.

For a moment utter confusion reigned. Then a shout went up.

"It's Octavian, Caesar's heir!" somebody shouted. "Octavian! Octavian! Welcome here to Rome."

"Impossible!" Lepidus was beside himself. "I had a letter from Octavian only yesterday. He is en route from Epirus on Caesar's orders. But it will take him at least a week to reach Rome. I must be mad!"

"Well," said Larry grimly, "there he is." He squinted. "Or *is* he?"

The general was closer now, his face clear in the fitful sunlight.

"What do you say, Marcus Aemilius?" Larry demanded. "Is that Octavian?"

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"He was just a hulking youth when I last saw him two years ago," wailed our host. "It might be he, and it might be—"

"—the Cardiff Giant!" gasped Mary, standing on tiptoe. "Hugh has used those gold bars to bribe a young army. The son of a gun!"

By this time the Legionairies had forced their way to the very foot of the rostrum. Hugh—oh, it was Hugh all right, even though he had dyed his hair black—waited a moment until the shouting died. Then he thundered:

"Antony! Stop your hypocritical mouthing. Come down. Let Caesar's righful heir speak to his people!"

"You lie!" screamed Antony, completely off-balance now. "You are some impostor. You are not Octavian!"

The mob growled deep in its throat.

"Antony," came the supremely confident reply, "who was the only man that ever bested you in a wrestling bout?"

"Why—why—" stammered the orator-athlete.

"It was our Octavian who floored you," a high voice screamed. "Two years ago it was, on the Feast of Lupercal."

"Aye," came another shout, "and he was only seventeen when he beat you!"

"I now challenge you to another test of strength, with dead Caesar to witness," cried the false Octavian. "Let the gods decide if I am an impostor."

ANTONY regained his poise in a twinkling. If there was one thing he prided himself on most, it was his physical prowess. Ripping off his toga, he sprang down the steps of the rostrum. At the same time Hugh dismounted and allowed a Centurion to remove his armor.

They stood forth then, in their tunics, two big men—but Antony was taller by half a head and at least twenty pounds heavier.

They circled while onlookers, both plebs and patricians, clawed each other for points of vantage. Then Antony lunged, wide open, like a bear!

Hugh caught one of those treelike arms. He bent forward quickly. The noble Roman consul shot over his head—landed on the cobblestones with a thud like that of a dropped sack of coal.

"Paratrooper jujitsu," chortled Larry. "Lordy! Lordy! Watch modern education pay off!"

Antony was up in a moment, his face contorted. This time he was more cautious. He feinted—managed to catch Hugh's right arm in a hammer lock. We could hear the muscles crack. I caught my breath.

"Hugh!" screamed Mary. "Hugh! Kill the big ox." Her face was white.

As if in answer, Hugh did a back flip and reversed the grip. His opponent went flying, landed on his prominent nose and took his time getting up.

He still couldn't understand what was happening to him. Shaking his bloody head, he made as if to lunge, then leaped back and kicked at Hugh's chin with his heavy red sandal. No holds barred in Roman wrestling.

The blow missed as Hugh dodged. Before we could blink our eyes, Antony was caught in a toe lock.

He soared, yelling—went down—and stayed down!

"Now," said Hugh to the delighted populace, "I will read you dear dead Caesar's will." He dusted his hands delicately and mounted the rostrum.

"Looks as if our side has won," Larry crowed. "Shall we help Hugh pull down the goal posts?"

He started to get up.

"Wait," said Mary. "I'm not so sure. What do you think, Bill?" It was the first time she had asked my opinion on an important matter.

"If Hugh had let us in on this, I'd be with him all the way," I answered. "But he pulled a sneak play. I don't like it. Let's string along with Lepidus a little longer."

Mary nodded. After a moment Larry did too. So we didn't wait to hear Hugh pirate the rest of Antony's speech or to see the wild mob pile benches and other wooden objects over Caesar's corpse to make the greatest funeral pyre in Roman history. Instead, with a panicky perspiring Lepidus in the lead, we went away from there in a great hurry.

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CHAPTER IV

An Ultimatum

THAT evening we foregathered—republicans and Caesarites alike—at Cicero's estate at Arpinum, or, to be exact, at the orator's birthplace which his heiress wife, Publia, had remodeled for him, at a price which Lepidus estimated to be around three and a half million sesterces, says $140,000. Arpinum typified "any place in a storm" in more ways than one, for the wind had risen to near-hurricane proportions.

We were nine at dinner, according to the inflexible Roman custom. Antony was there, with a black eye, a skinned nose and a strained back. So were Brutus and Cassius. Forced into an uneasy alliance by the false Octavian's coup, members of the two factions walked around each other stiff-legged, like hostile dogs. At any moment I expected to see daggers flash in the soft lamplight.

"Isn't Cicero wonderful?" Mary whispered to me once.

"What's wonderful about him?" I had taken a dislike to the pompous, paunchy old man at sight. He reminded me too much of what I might become in another forty years.

"He talks in quotation marks," she giggled. "Listen to him."

Cicero was striding up and down amidst the gaudily painted statuary in the peristylium, timing his words to the steady splash of rain through the central opening in the roof and into the huge tank sunk in the floor.

"What a time! What a civilization," he was thundering. "Any excuse will serve a tyrant. You may share the labors of the great, but you will not share the spoil.

"I do not purchase regret at such a price, however. Fortune watches over our lives. He who strives will find his gods strive for him equally. Danger gleams, like sunshine, to a brave man's eyes. United we stand, divided we fall! While there's life, there's hope! As for me, I will raise a storm of words and rain a very tempest of abuse upon the usurper!"

"Didn't I tell you?" whispered Mary. "He managed to crib from Aesop, Demosthenes, Euripides, Aristophanes and even from himself in that one speech," I grinned. "No wonder he's popular."

After the polite applause died down we trooped into the triclinium for dinner. As we did so Mary caught my arm. "Bill," she said quietly. "You'll have to be our spokesman."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Larry's a dreamer. He's not up to it. And I'm under the handicap of being a woman. So stiffen that backbone of yours. Will you? For my sake?"

"Sure," I gulped. "Anything you say, Mary."

In the dining room we found three deeply cushioned divans drawn up in a "C" around a small, highly polished round table. We were seated—or rather, laid out—according to what our host considered our importance. Brutus, Cassius and Antony were placed at the right hand couch in that order of precedence, to Antony's extreme annoyance.

On the middle divan were Larry, Mary and then Cicero himself in the coveted Consul's seat, because, he said, he expected urgent despatches from Rome but because, I suspected, he wanted to talk to the pretty stranger. Finally, on the despised left was Publia, in the host's usual place, my humble self and, in the least place of all, poor Lepidus.

Marcus Aemilius turned scarlet at the studied insult.

"I'll sue the old fool," he kept muttering. "I'll sue him tomorrow for this. And I'll collect, too, in any court in Rome." The rest of his remarks I won't translate!

Under the circumstances, conversation languished while one group of slaves removed our sandals, another gang provided us with napkins and basins of water for our hands and a third brought in the gustatio, or hors d'oeuvres. Cassius told Brutus what a marvelous speech he had made. Cicero

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cooed at Mary while his wife glared. Antony was in the midst of explaining how he had been fouled when a nervous slave managed to spill a cup of honeyed wine on his purple-panneled tunic. The consul scrambled to his feet, knocked the slave across the room, and was only quieted when Cicero and Publia both apologized profusely.

Mary looked helplessly at me across the table.

"There's a blowup due any second," her eyes said. "Any ideas?"

I ROLLED over and favored Publia with one of my best salesman's smiles. Her handsome, hawknosed face, surmounted by an elaborate coiffure made up of hundreds of tiny curls, resembled one of the storm clouds overhead as she saw her dinner party collapsing.

"Madame," I said, "does a stranger dare make a suggestion which may enliven your banquet?"

"Enliven it!" she fairly hissed. "Resurrect it, mean you? I told Marcus Tullius—" She bit her full lips. "What is your suggestion?"

"I brought with me from Gaul," I lied, "a wonderful new additive for wine. We provincials find it very effective in relaxing tensions. May I prepare a draught for your approval?"

She was a woman of affairs and used to making quick decisions.

"Come to the kitchens," she said. "I must see if that clumsy slave is being properly flogged for spilling the wine. Bring your additive. I am in a mood to try anything before blood is spilled also."

I found the bottle of alcohol in our gear and followed my hostess.

The slave already was being properly flogged by a chamberlain who swung a many-lashed scourge with gusto.

"Mistress, mistress!" blubbered the lad, a Greek by his looks. "Have mercy!" His voice rose to a shriek.

"Be silent," Publia snapped, "before I have you thrown alive to the carp in the fish pond. They say a diet of human flesh improves their flavor."

Mercifully, we went on at last to the wine cellar. There, with the help of another cringing slave, I managed to locate an amphora of something closely resembling dry vermouth.

I mixed the wine, the alcohol and some hardpacked snow which wealthy Romans always bring from the mountains to ice their drinks, stirred gently, poured the result into two silver cups, tossed in two olives, and sipped to prove the stuff was not poisonous. As I had hoped, the snow diluted the concoction considerably. It was a passable Martini! With a deep bow, I presented the second cup to Publia.

"It burns!" was her first startled comment. Then, after a moment: "Why, this is excellent, stranger. Prepare more of it for our guests. I will be the talk of all those cats in Rome tomorrow for this potion."

To understand what followed, remember that Romans of that era had not discovered the doubtful blessings of distilled spirits. They drank quantities of wine, but that beverage had a comparatively low alcoholic content and was usually mixed with water, honey, spices and other dreadful things.

By the time the fish, the roasted peacock—served in its splendid skin and feathers—and the many rich desserts were things of the past, Cicero had come around to the end of the third table and had his arm around Lepidus' shoulders. Brutus was trying—unsuccessfully—to make a date with Mary. And Mark Antony was telling Cassius that their mutual interest in early Etruscan pottery made them blood brothers.

After the meal ended, we sang some of Sappho's songs. I particularly liked the one which began, "I loved thee, At-this, once—long, long ago." And the staid Publia, who was one jump ahead of the rest of them, of course, put on a diaphanous "Serician tissue" and obliged with an Egyptian temple dance.

"Bill, you were wonderful!" Mary squeezed my hand for the first time as we ambled back into the "parlor" at last.

"Thank Professor Gordon," I answered, "and pray that the alky holds

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out. It's getting confoundly low."

As we were taking seats around the pool a slave came in and handed a set of waxed tablets to Cicero. Our host broke the string which bound them, read, and puffed his cheeks with rage.

"Your friend," he glared in turn at Larry, Mary and me, "is losing no time. Listen to this proclamation from the issue of the *Acta Diurna*." He read:

> Romans! Be of good cheer. Your Octavian has returned. Disperse to your homes. Tomorrow there will be a distribution of two gold aurei and an extra measure of wheat to each citizen.

"Eight dollars each," I whistled. "Hugh must have found the keys to the Roman treasury." Then to Larry: "But what's the *Acta Diurna*."

"It's Rome's newspaper, the *Daily Doings*," answered our antiquarian. "It's written on posters and put up on the pillars of public buildings. The slaves of patricians hang around, make copies of the various editions and rush them to their masters. Quite a scandal sheet, I've heard."

That proclamation settled it. Cicero, who fancied himself as a lawyer, drew up a long document which affirmed that we were all friends who would stand together to the death against the false Octavian. Republicans and Caesarites alike pricked their fingers and signed their names in blood according to the old Phoenician pirate custom. Which, as Mary murmured in my ear, was right and proper since most of them really were freebooters of a sort.

THEN, just as Larry, who was in one of his rare glows, was teaching the assembled company to sing a Latin version of "Auld Lang Syne," another slave —there seemed to be hundreds of them —came dashing in.

"Marcus Tullius," he gabbled. "There is one without who would have audience. He has troops at his back."

While Cicero dithered, Antony shouldered his way forward.

"I have my Legion quartered nearby," he roared. "I'll order an attack."

I looked at Lepidus and shook my head violently.

"Peace!" he cried. "We shall never regain Rome by a skirmish in the dark. I say let the man come. Hear what he has to offer."

His counsel finally prevailed. A few minutes later Hugh came stamping in.

"Well!" He made the water fly from his sagum as he tossed the garment at a slave. "You are all holed up here, are you? I should have brought my entire force and scotched you for good."

I stared at him, hardly believing my eyes. This wasn't the Hugh we had known at Hutter. He carried himself like a ramrod. His chest stuck out a foot. There was a downward quirk to the corners of his mouth. "Good gosh," I thought, "he has become a Somatomaniac!"

"I won't be talked to so in my own home," Cicero thundered belatedly.

"You once said 'There is no place more delightful than home,'" sneered Hugh, "so why not talk here? First, I would have a word alone with my—friends."

"We want no word alone with you," Mary spoke up, "unless you stop this clowning and promise to behave."

"So?" He shifted into English. "I'm offering you important posts in my government."

"As equals?" Larry asked.

"Equals!" He snorted. "Too late for that. You ran out on me at the Forum. No. I'm the only man who can put civilization on the right track. I have a mission. But I want you to act as my minister of science and Bill Lake to be in charge of propaganda."

"Rot!" I used his favorite expression deliberately. "And Mary?"

"Oh, she can be minister of education or something."

"Hugh," said the girl softly, "are we still engaged?"

"Well—*Uh*." He flinched for the first time and I remembered his encounter with Cleopatra. "I'm afraid that's off, Mary. A man in my position is, well—" He straightened a tie that wasn't there. "That's all I wanted to know."

"Hugh," I said in Latin for the bene-

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fit of the others, who were beginning to mutter and finger their daggers, "you're in a spot and you know it. In the first place, you're not the proper somatype. With your knowledge of engineering, we'll have atom bombs dropping in twenty instead of two thousand years.

"Secondly, these gentlemen have just finished signing a pact to hunt you down. You have Rome, yes. But you have only one Legion in the city plus the rag tag and bobtail which have come in to recruit for the Parthian War. Antony has one veteran Legion under his command, six thousand fine troops. Octavian will be here in a few days with three more. You will be isolated. Why don't you join forces with us. I'm sure you will be given a high post in the coalition government. Then we really can start building a decent world."

"Visceratonic wish fulfillment," he scoffed. "These—jackals, didn't Lepidus call them—can't build anything. I am the world's hope."

"There speaks Caesar's ghost," yelped Cicero. "Crimes are not to be measured by the issue of events, but from the bad intentions of men."

"Still another honorable man," snarled Antony. Somehow he got his hands on a sword and was inching forward.

Larry tried to make one last desperate appeal.

"Hugh, you're talking just like a Hitler or a Mussolini," he warned. "I can practically see your head swelling. Come off your high horse. Don't you know you can't win?"

"Think not?" His eyes had a half-insane, animal gleam. "You forget what Bill called my knowledge of engineering."

As Antony sprang, Hugh's hand flashed to his belt. Six pistol shots rang out like the rattle of a stick along a board fence. The first sent Antony reeling.

The others extinguished the five lamps which illuminated the room. Before slaves could scurry in with other lights, Hugh, and Prof. Gordon's third gift, had disappeared.

CHAPTER V

Cleopatra

BY the time we had bandaged Mark's head, he had a nasty crease along his skull to add to his other wounds. We were all cold sober and fighting mad, even to easy-going Lepidus.

"First," said Cassius, "we want an explanation. You strangers are not from Gaul. What part of Hell do you really come from?"

As best we could, we explained our return through time. I had thought, and so had Lepidus, that this would be next to impossible. But all of the company were intelligent, educated men, well grounded in the philosophies. With Cicero in the van, they soon grasped the situation.

"Professor Gordon's scheme misfired," Larry finished at last. "Hugh saw an opportunity to seize power. He took it, just as any one of you would have done under his circumstances."

"But," Cicero's brilliant old mind was wrestling with the unfamiliar time track idea, "now that he has used his foreknowledge to put his head in the Roman wolf's mouth successfully, he can no longer predict future events."

"That is correct," I answered. "In fact, Hugh is now at a disadvantage because he must act according to the limitations of his own somatype. We, being of many different temperaments, can move in various ways to confuse and block him. Democracy is full of 'variety and disorder' and that is all to the good in this situation."

"But what is this magic he has, that made him able to defeat me at the Forum and strike me at a distance tonight?" Antony husked.

We had more explaining to do, but finally got across a faint inkling of the wonders of modern science.

"We might as well go into exile at once if the usurper knows how to build such marvels," sighed Lepidus.

"Not if we act quickly," Cicero dis-

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agreed. "As president of the College of Augurs, I know full well that it takes time to manufacture even the simplest miracle."

"You say his type has certain weaknesses?" Cassius blinked thoughtfully. "Tell us more about this."

I started fishing up bits and pieces of Hugh's case history and translating them as best I could: Twenty-two years old. Eldest of three children, the others girls. Parents divorced. Father's garage had been a haven for rum runners during prohibition.

Hugh had some early trouble with the police as the leader of a youthful gang. Worked in father's garage until drafted. Became a paratrooper and later a fighter pilot. Badly wounded over Rabaul. Finished the war as a P.R.O. Received Congressional Medal of Honor. Entered college under G. I. Bill. Was majoring in chemical engineering and minoring in psychology. Very popular, especially with women.

"And this scholar you spoke of—this Gordon—loosed such a man on our world with gold enough to bribe a Legion and with a modern weapon!" Cassius raged. "May the gods strike him dead."

"You say," Brutus licked his full red lips, "that the false Octavian is popular with women. Can we strike at him through this?"

"Antony probably can tell you," quipped Publia.

"'A woman should be seen, not heard,' according to Sophocles," Cicero said, giving her a blistering look. Then: "A fig for this man's weaknesses. What is his probable course of action?"

"He will endeavor to make better weapons for his Legion before Octavian arrives," Larry replied without the slightest hesitation. "Since he is a chemist, I would say he would try to manufacture gunpowder."

"What is that?" Antony wanted to know.

I gave him a graphic description and added that the materials—saltpeter, charcoal and sulphur—were readily available.

"We, too, shall make it." He jumped to his feet, then groaned at the pain in his back. "I shall give orders to my armorers."

"Hold!" cried Mary. "We agreed, did we not, that we must never meet Hugh on his own ground? He will be too clever for us there."

"I do not think," Antony glared at her and then at Publia, "that women should have part in our counsels."

"You don't, huh?" I was so angry that I spoke in English. Shifting back to Latin, I rushed on: "In that case I suggest you go hold counsel with yourself. Are we making a common front, gentlemen, or do we continue to ride off in all directions? Lepidus, what is your opinion?"

"Well," Lepidus started to compromise as usual. "I—uh—"

I RISKED crucifixion by shifting position on the couch we occupied and driving my elbow into his august ribs.

"*Owp!*" He groaned, started to become angry, thought better of it and pulled his chest up where it belonged. "I vote that the ladies remain."

"Go on, Mary," I cooed. "You have a fresh viewpoint. Also you are better balanced temperamentally than any of the rest of us. Speak."

"I have been thinking," she began carefully, "that our only chance of success is in appealing to the Romans' desire for peace."

"Peace!" Antony turned pale. "We are a warrior race. Even now we prepare for another attack on Parthia."

"And I can prophesy," she answered him fearlessly, "that, if you go to war against them, the Parthians will defeat you utterly, just as they destroyed Crassus at Carrhae not long ago. Look, you —you big Somatotonic oaf—Romans have been fighting almost constantly for three hundred years. For the last two decades you have waged a bloody and senseless civil war.

"And what have your conquests gained? A host of slaves who throw honest Roman citizens out of employment. A flood of cheap wheat from the provinces which has ruined Italy's farmers.

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A destruction of civil liberties by your censors—which has made the Popular Assembly a laughing stock and the Senate a rubber stamp for dictators!"

"*Euge! Euge!* Well put!" cried Cicero, Brutus and Cassius together, as Antony almost burst a blood vessel.

"If we meet Hugh and his new weapons on the field of battle, we shall be defeated." Her voice rang clearly through the big, over-decorated room. "If, instead, we offer the Roman people peace, jobs and a return of the ballot, we shall win. I tell you this: If the men of Rome refuse to listen, the women of Rome, who have lost their loved ones in battle or have seen them rot in the rabbit warrens they call homes, will rise like furies, to our support!"

"Women! Women! Women!" yelled Antony, bouncing up again.

"Sit down, Marcus," said Publia, "or I will mention a few instances when vestal virgins and other women rose to *your* support."

He sat!

"Here is my plan, then," Mary went on when a sort of quiet had been restored. "Let Hugh make his magical weapons with which to kill people. We shall make a magic which can help people to live! Then we shall challenge him to prove which is better."

"Now Mary," I pleaded. She really was getting out of hand. "Gunpowder is easy to make. But the things you are talking of will take months to manufacture. How on earth do you expect to make automobiles or even washing machines in the ten days before Octavian arrives and the fighting starts?"

"Who said anything about automobiles or washing machines?" she snapped. "I was thinking of much simpler things."

"For example."

"Well," she frowned, "let us say matches, soap, plow shares, clothes pins and even buttons!

"You know, Bill," she went on, ignoring the baffled looks of the Romans, "I got to thinking about such things after Hugh recited that silly poem about the 'flannels of the poor.' I realized I never saw underthings hanging on back yard lines here. Why? First, because soap is unknown. The poorer plebeians take their pitiful clothes to the fountains and hammer them with paddles to get them partially clean. Then, for lack of clothes pins, they get the clothes dirty again by spreading them on the cobblestones to dry. Finally, they tie them to their bodies with thongs because buttons don't exist. See what I mean?"

"I think so. Larry, does your encyclopedia tell you how to make things like that?"

"Of course." He pushed back his cowlick. "But I'd need workshops in which to manufacture them.

"Your pardon," said Publia. "What is a—a button?"

Mary was wearing a simple Greek chiton which set off her trim figure to advantage and contrasted strikingly with Publia's flowing stola with its yard-wide purple flounce. Now she unlaced the silken cords which bound the shoulders of the garment, turned, and displayed the method by which her brassiere was fastened!

IT brought down the house! If I had any doubt that she was on the right track I lost it when I saw how all of them—with the exception of Antony—ignored those lovely, rounded shoulders to stare at that simple fastening.

"Wonderful! Wonderful." Publia clapped her plump white hands. "I must put buttons on all my garments. I shall be the envy of every matron in Rome."

"Incredible," murmured Cicero. "As lack of adornment is said to become some women, so this subtle button, without embellishment, gives delight."

" 'Of surpassing beauty and in bloom of youth,' " Antony quoted, pretending that he, too, was speaking of the new fastening. I prodded Lepidus again and he pounded on a table.

"Order!" he commanded. "This brings up new problems. First, the factory district of Rome is in the usurper's hands. Second, the making of this magic will little avail us if the people do not understand it."

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"Leave the matter of education to me," I said. "The lack of factories is more serious. Has anyone a proposal?"

"Why, I shall take my Legion and capture some," Antony beamed.

"And start the war we are trying to avoid? No good."

"Ah, why did Cleopatra leave Rome?" sighed Cassius, the arch plotter. "She could have deployed her thousand Nubian warriors around the Emporium on pretext of protecting her ships. The usurper hardly would have dared attack the Queen of Egypt."

"Wait!" shouted Antony. "Cleopatra can hardly have sailed down the Tiber in this storm. The royal barge must still be at anchor. I shall go to her at once." He hesitated, then, feeling his banged-up face. "On second thought, the Queen has a horror of ugliness. She is repelled by wounds or anything remotely suggesting death."

"Whom else amongst us would she trust?" asked Cassius.

"Lepidus, perhaps," Antony suggested grudgingly.

"Not I!" gulped Marcus Aemilius. "I am a happily married man. I will have no dealings with that sacred cat. Besides, I doubt she is in any mood to deal with me, knowing that I have made my peace with her beloved Caesar's enemies. Moreover, Cleopatra was always the opportunist. If an usurper is entrenched at Rome, she will be inclined to join him."

"We shall go together to her in the morning," said Mary firmly. "I believe I have a method of persuading Her Majesty in our favor."

"It is after midnight now and Rome is sixty miles from here," I said. "We had best get started. I shall join you." I had no intention of letting Lepidus relax, now that he was going good.

"We should consult the auspices first," Marcus Aemilius still temporized. "As Rome's High Priest, I dare not take the responsibility."

"When two augurs get together they should wink at each other." Cicero calmly suited action to word. "We are all in this together now, even if the sky should fall. I would not have us delay matters to see whether or not a flock of sacred chickens will or will not eat. Refrain from peering into the future. Out upon you!"

For endless hours we sloshed along the Appian Way and then across the muddy Campagna plain on relays of fast horses. It was a dismal trip because (a) Mary soon was soaked to the skin and rode along looking like her own ghost, (b) Lepidus had a hangover, and (3) my beasts took fieldish delight in trying to pinch my legs against stone walls or ancient tombs.

"Man on horseback, that's me," I muttered.

When we reached the workers' district in the southern part of Rome things became even more unpleasant, if possible. The five- and six-story tenements exhaled a stink which turned my stomach. Garbage swirled with the waters of the flooded Tiber in the gutters. And, from time to time, a gale would rip showers of loose tiles from the crazy roofs and send them showering about us like brickbats.

It was with sighs of thanksgiving that we reached the banks of the yellow river at noon and managed to persuade a boatman to ferry us to the Egyptian ships which lay half-hidden in the fog and steady rain. There was bitter argument when our pilot tried to board a great barge with furled crimson sails and silver oars. Lepidus' credentials finally got us on deck and, after an interminable wait, into Cleopatra's presence.

She was a sad sight as she sat in huddled splendor amidst a dozen smoking charcoal braziers which hardly took the March chill off the draughty cabin. Neither could the banks of flowers cover the smell of mildew or the sobbing of hidden guitars drown out the roar of the storm. Even so, the queen remained beautiful, though pale and all too obviously covered with goose pimples.

WHAT does one talk about to Majesty, especially when one's motives are suspect? In this case, after

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the ceremonious exchange of greetings had ended, we tried to break the ice by discussing the weather.

"Rome is worse than the infernal regions of Avernus," she wailed, hugging her lovely self and shivering. "Cleopatra has been half-frozen ever since she arrived. How do you Romans exist?"

"We wear plenty of clothing in bad weather," frowned Lepidus. He had three woolen tunics under his toga. "If I may be so bold, Your Majesty—"

"Ha! That is what our poor dead Caesar said," she cried. "Always telling Cleopatra to cover herself. Know you!" She straightened imperiously. "Clothes are made only to disguise ugly bodies. Cleopatra is beautiful. Her statue stands in the Temple of Venus. She would not be caught mummified in a baggy stola!"

"May I beg to differ with Your Majesty?" Mary spoke up. "Clothes need not be thick and lumpy to be warm! Look!" She dipped into the professor's gift box, now considerably the worse for wear, and brought forth a pair of shimmering nylons.

For the first time the queen warmed up.

"Wonderful. Wonderful." She leaned forward with a little gasp and forgot to speak in the third person. "I did not know that even the looms of Serica could produce such gossamers."

"Put them on," Mary cajoled her. "See how warm they are."

After we had been regaled by the sight of Cleopatra putting stockings on those long legs which might be destined to sink a thousand ships at the Battle of Actium, Mary shook out a black silk negligee.

"Try this," she coaxed.

The queen was as delighted as a girl. She really was twenty-four and the mother of Caesar's only son. She preened herself. Clapped for slaves to bring mirrors. Pirouetted. Gave her hand to Mary to kiss.

The Chanel Number 4 brought another squeal of delight. The crude perfumes of that age were mixed with olive oil instead of alcohol—greasy messes which turned rancid almost as soon as applied.

Last out of the box came the makeup kit. Under Mary's ministrations our gypsy lost her pale, oily look and assumed a splendor which made even old Lepidus breathe rapidly. By the time the demonstration was over, Cleopatra had joined us, though she tried not to show it.

"I have been told to beware of Romans, as well as of Greeks, who come bearing gifts," she said at last. "There is new conspiracy afoot. What part would you have me play in it?"

When we told her she looked grave.

"The usurper—if, as you say, he is not Octavian—already has asked me to receive him," she hesitated. "Egypt must be careful not to offend mighty Rome. And yet, you two are from the far future!" The sovereign who firmly believed that her mummified body would return to life at the end of several thousand years had taken time travel in her stride. "And you can perform miracles. . . ." She sat lost in thought for a time. "If you will guarantee the freedom of my country," she stroked the negligee and held out her feet to admire those wonderful hose, "and if you will send that handsome Mark Antony to console me in my Caesar's death, then I—then Cleopatra will deploy her troops."

As we gave our solemn promise she clapped her little brown hands once more and began issuing the necessary orders.

CHAPTER VI

Peace or War

IN frantic haste we worked, practically without sleep, the following week behind that screen of impassive ebony warriors. As we had hoped, Hugh dared no attack.

To keep the uneasy peace between our factions, Mary and Larry enlisted Cassius, Brutus and other republican leaders into the work of manufacturing miracles.

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Lepidus and I concentrated on preparing and distributing propaganda directed at the populace. We were supposed to have Antony's help but he was seldom free. He had begun to lose interest as soon as we decided not to make war on Hugh and was falling completely under Cleopatra's spell.

As for Cicero, he remained at Arpinum and issued ringing Philippics against Hugh in an unending stream.

The only times I saw Mary were when I consulted with her about the construction of several hundred silk bags for small hot air balloons. I had conceived the idea that the best way to get across the "iron curtain" which Hugh had established north of our factories was to send over balloons loaded with bang-up propaganda. Even though most of the bags were sure to be confiscated by the Vigiles, I felt sure their miraculous appearance would spread the word of our plans.

"I always had underestimated you, Bill," Mary said on one of our brief encounters. "I think you're positively marvelous."

"I love you too," I said with a silly grin. We were standing in a huge barracks where scores of slave and free handicraftsmen worked side by side to turn out buttons and other gadgets.

She brushed the touselled hair out of her tired eyes and looked at me sharply.

"You know I've always loved you," I went on seriously. "Now that Hugh—I mean, now that— Well, do you think maybe you could learn to care a little for a fat guy like me?"

"Maybe." She stood on tiptoe to kiss me. I went away walking on air.

My elation continued right through the week as our battery of clerks penned terse notes on pieces of papyrus at my direction. Those notes spoke in glowing terms of the wonders the republicans were preparing for their beloved subjects. They explained the use of buttons and such. They campaigned against Hugh's stream of jingo proclamations. They pictured the blessings of peace, honest jobs and the Four Freedoms. I felt as light as one of my balloons as I watched Lepidus sign those messages with the title I had invented, "Chairman of the Plebeian Council" and as I sent them scudding to their destinations on the prevailing wind.

And then came Octavian, Caesar's stepson, marching right up to the suburbs with his three glittering legions.

My elation withered, as on a red hot stove, when Mary and Octavian met in his tent that night at our council. You've seen his statues. You know what he looked like—tall, dashing, maturely handsome despite his nineteen years, with curly black hair and laughing eyes. He wasn't spoiled and imperious, the way the books I had read said he became later. Instead he was frank, intelligent and genuinely concerned about the way things were going. "Young demigod." That term pretty accurately describes Octavian in 44 B.C.

He and Mary couldn't keep their eyes off each other. It was love at first sight, or I'm no haberdasher. I took my heart off my sleeve and put it back in my wallet. Just Bill Lake's luck again. Everybody may love a fat man, but the trouble is, nobody does anything about it.

Antony was absent, as usual, so we didn't have that clash of wills which, on the original time track, eventually warped the Triumvirate into an evil, almost entirely Somatotonic thing. On the other hand, Lepidus, having gotten the whip hand over the group, behaved like a little man. He actually rallied support when Octavian objected to our proposed plan for challenging Hugh. I sat beside the chairman and I noticed that, on the few occasions when he lost a point in the heated debate, he winced as though expecting another poke in the ribs.

"But will the usurper accept such a challenge?" Octavian argued. "Why should he do so? Won't it put him at a disadvantage?"

"He dare not refuse," Lepidus answered. "Our spies report the mob has gone wild about the balloon messages. The plebs would tear him to pieces if he showed any fear of us."

"We cannot lose in such a contest,"

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Cassius spoke up. "I have seen what we are making in the factories. A week ago I thought our visitors from the future were mad. Now I am convinced they know whereof they speak."

"It is not so easy, Gaius Cassius," Mary disagreed. "I know Hugh. He will have miracles of his own."

"Then—" Octavian began.

"Hugh's miracles will be of a military nature." She smiled at him. "If the Roman people want war instead of peace, he will win."

"Then," Octavian tried again, "why give him the opportunity. "We shall attack at once."

BUT this brought unexpected opposition from Lepidus.

"My young friends say that if you attack you are undone," said Lepidus without the benefit of a nudge. "I believe them. Your Legions are untrained to withstand the weapons the usurper will have devised. They will melt away like cut grain. *But*, if we inveigle him into the Forum, where his troops cannot use those weapons because of the crowds, *and* if the people turn thumbs down after his demonstration, *we* shall win. I, who have campaigned in Spain and Gaul, tell you this as a soldier."

"I have been trained as a warrior from my cradle," said Octavian thoughtfully. "I think in terms of battles and of blood. Perhaps that way is wrong. Let us put it to the test, as you say."

Then and there we all signed our names to a tablet challenging Hugh to let the populace decide, according to age-old custom, whether he or the Council should rule Rome. The original we sent to him by official messenger. Copies were drafted and set drifting over the city.

Dawn was breaking—a warm, sunny dawn for a change—when our messenger returned. He bore two tablets. One, scribbled in English and addressed to Mary and me, said simply.

> You had better be *good!* Love and kisses.
>
> —Hugh.

The other, dripping with official seals and inscribed in flowery Latin, read:

> Traitors to Rome! The Emperor accepts your challenge, the better to confound you. Let the meeting be held at the Eighth Hour in the Forum two days hence. The Emperor, of course, will perform his miracle first. Afterwards, if you decide not to present yours, His Magnificence will graciously accept your submission. If you persist and the people vote against you, your worthless lives and valuable property are forfeit.

"'His Magnificence,'" sighed Mary. "Poor Hugh."

If we had worked hard the previous week, we sweated blood for the next day and a half. And, when our final preparations were complete the results were heartbreakingly meager—a few boxes of buttons, of mediocre lye soap, of hard candy, of ridiculous clothes-pins and other gadgets which I did not bother to examine. A few farm tools for demonstration purposes only. With the best will in the world, our workers hadn't been able to go into large scale production on such items. A few.

I turned away bitterly. It was inconceivable that such trinkets would impress the hardboiled mob already gathering at the Forum, the Roman mob which had been conditioned to war for centuries.

"Unless your propaganda has softened them up, Bill." I jumped and whirled to find Mary watching me. There were dark circles under her eyes but she was still smiling that crooked little smile which made me love her. I wanted to take her in my arms and comfort her. Instead I said:

"Uh, Mary. Just forget what I said last week, will you?"

"You mean?" Her eyes filled with tears.

"I know how you and Octavian feel about each other," I blundered on. "We Visceratonics know a lot of things like that without being told."

"Oh, Bill! I'm so sorry!"

"Never mind, Mary. Just listen. Whatever happens at the Forum, you stick by Octavian. He's a big man if he doesn't say much—too big for Hugh to defeat in the long run. But he needs somebody like you to guide him; to see

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he doesn't go chasing after a crown and divinity, as Augustus Caesar.

"Keep him away from greedy, ambitious women. And don't let him send Lepidus to Africa. Marcus Aemilius will know how to make him toe the line."

"Why, Bill. You talk almost as if you knew."

"Forget it! Let's be on our way. Curtain's going up."

Then, for the second time, Mary kissed me before she ran down the factory aisle so I wouldn't see the tears on her cheeks, or vice versa.

I had finally got the others to agree to enter the city as unostentatiously as possible. We were the *Plebeian* Council. There was to be no fanfare and no dramatics. We were to go in pairs, on foot and by separate streets. That would prove we were true democrats like old Cincinnatus . . . and it would also set an almost impossible task for Hugh if he should try to stop us.

Lepidus and I puffed along together —the longest walk either of us had taken in years. As we left the drab factory district and worked our way north toward the Forum we found the city in holiday mood. Everybody was out, dressed in his best. But the shutters of all the shops were locked tight, which meant that their keepers expected a riot before the day was out. And the walls screamed with gaudy placards proclaiming the war prowess of the new emperor. Many of these, I noted, already were scribbled over in red chalk with the "Peace," "Jobs" and "Votes" slogans of the Council. Rome was honing for trouble!

AS we fought for elbow room on the narrow sidewalks of the Sacred Way we heard the screaming of trumpets and the tramp of marching men behind us. Cheering or booing goodnaturedly as yet, the mob flattened us against a temple wall as it made way for a Legion. Eyes front, oblong leather shields swinging in unison, wicked pikes in serried rows, the troops went by us like a living battering ram. After them marched about three quarters of the 600 members of the Senate in their flowing togas and bright chaplets.

"At least a few had the courage not to join in this false Triumph," growled Lepidus.

And then came Hugh in a purple mantle gleaming with gold. He was standing arrogantly erect in a chariot drawn by four snow-white horses and driven by a slim Greek. He looked neither to right nor left.

"Io Triumphe! Ave Caesar! Ave Octaviane!" screamed the mob while the air grew heavy with the odor of incense burning on hundreds of portable altars and matrons on the balconies rained down masses of roses or sprinkled saffron over the procession.

"If this were a real Triumph," Lepidus shouted in my ear, "the usurper would have a slave standing beside him to whisper 'Remember, you are but a man' every few seconds."

"Not Hugh," I grinned. "Come on. Let's get to the Forum while there's still an inch of room left."

The huge square was jammed to overflowing and it seemed ages before we were able to reach and mount the rostrum. People were standing shoulder to shoulder, leaving no room for the troops. These had to turn aside and let the chariot proceed with only the Senators as a guard of honor. With one exception, the windows of surrounding buildings fairly popped with spectators and the roofs were black with others. Only the Temple of Concord stood empty behind a tight ring of troops.

Antony already had arrived and was sitting beside Cleopatra just behind the balustrade. He lifted one arm in lazy greeting as we came up. There, I thought, if the gods be kind today, lolls not the brutal Triumvir and murderer of Cicero but the future henpecked prince consort of Egypt.

Octavian appeared, with Mary at his side, shepherding our precious boxes of miracles. Although we had agreed not to do so, he was wearing a snow white candidatus. Here was more trouble. My heart sank. The other members of the Council, or at least the majority of them,

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arrived on schedule. Then we waited for Hugh, who was making a tremendous fuss about dismounting from his chariot and greeting the senators and other patricians who clustered beneath the rostrum.

That gave me a chance to study the mob. There was a vast difference from that which had attended Caesar's funeral, but what was it? Then the answer hit me all of a heap. Half of the people present were women, many of whom had brought their children, even their babes in arms. Well! Mary's hunch was working. I felt a little better.

There was another bellow of trumpets. Majestically, like a man made of wood, Hugh mounted the rostrum. Solemly we gave him the straight arm salute which he did not deign to return. Instead he turned his back on us, saluted the crowd and, after silence had been established, began to speak.

I'll not repeat all he said. It was the same old hokum about the past, present and future glories of Rome; about the coming victory over Parthia; about Rome's destiny to rule the world; about the cowards, whose names he would not sully his tongue to mention, who talked of craven peace.

And they ate it up—or at least I thought so at first. They yelled at the appropriate moments until the very cobblestones rattled. But, as I looked closer, I saw that young men were doing most of the shouting. The women, and tight knots of older workers and displaced farmers were keeping their peace and even frowning.

"The traitors have promised you miracles today," Hugh was winding up his bombast at last. "They tell you their magic will make your lives easier. But I tell you that only the victorious advances of our Legions can make life easier. Only in battle can we take the slaves who labor to fill the coffers of almighty Rome."

"—And take away the honest jobs of Roman citizens," some unseen leather-lunged spectator bellowed.

I looked at Lepidus and saw him grinning all over his round face. A plant in the audience! Something I had forgotten to attend to in the last-minute rush My protege was learning fast.

Hugh reddened. Perhaps he was remembering what he had done to Antony. But he was smart.

"Who wants to toil when he can live like a king on the toil of others?" he jeered. "I tell you that, if you follow me, no Roman citizen will have to lift a hand. And," he took a page out of Nero's book, "there will be daily circuses in the Colosseum which I plan to build and baked bread, instead of wheat, will be distributed free at every street corner daily."

"Bread from the provinces," yelled the heckler. The Lictors were looking for him but the mob, beginning to chuckle now, was effectively blocking their progress. "Bread which has pauperized Italy's hardy farmers. Bread which has driven them to Rome to live on your dole."

"Bread, bread!" Others took up the shout. "Bloody bread."

Hugh affected to be hurt. He held up his hand until a sort of quiet was restored.

"You do not believe me," he said sadly. "You think I am like Sulla and Pompey, who promised you victories and gave you defeats. Look then, at my miracle. It is the weapon which makes the Legions invincible. With it they can conquer the world, yes even the yellow peoples of far Serica, so that you all may feast. Only when Rome rules the entire world can you have peace! Watch!"

Majestically he turned. Dramatically he pointed to the weather-beaten and neglected Temple of Concord.

CHAPTER VII

New Time Track

A CENTURY paced forward briskly. One hundred brawny right arms swung backward and forward in unison. One hundred round black objects arched

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through the bright spring sky. As they struck there was a blaze of light, an ear-shattering explosion. The temple dissolved!

Now I'm not saying that a hundred black powder hand grenades wrecked a building one hundred feet square and proportionately tall. Hugh undoubtedly had wanted to make his show as overwhelming as possible. Therefore he must have planted mines inside the temple to be set off by the first concussions.

But black powder is not used in modern warfare for a very good reason. It is tricky stuff, especially when manufactured by amateurs. So Hugh miscalculated. Instead of a spectacle, he touched off a holocaust! The eruption rained bits of marble from one end of the Forum to the other. Scores were wounded by the falling debris. A few were knocked from the roofs. Even the grenadiers were hurled to the ground.

For a moment the crowd was stunned. Then, as women and children began screaming, an ominous growl rose from the throats of their men. Miracles were all right—but not when they backfired against Romans. That riot the shopkeepers feared was aborning.

I was standing at Hugh's left and saw his face turn white. But he still wasn't licked.

"Romans! Romans!" His great voice cut through the rising uproar. "Forgive me. I did not realize the strength of my own magic. With it we can conquer not only the world but the very stars. The Lictors will give four gold aurei to anyone who is injured."

That was a tremendous bribe for those days when the average working man earned about sixteen cents a day. Before it could be appreciated, however, that gimlet shout came back at him from the crowd.

"Usurper! Charlatan! You cannot bribe us with stolen gold from our own treasury! Make another miracle if you are so mighty. Return our wounded loved ones to health!"

I saw Lepidus and Mary whispering frantically together. Then the Chairman shouldered his way past Hugh to the front of the rostrum. He was bleeding from a slight head wound. The people recognized the bulging frame of their High Priest and grew silent.

"Beloved Romans," he bellowed. "The usurper can make black magic only. He can only make wounds, not heal them. But we of the Plebeian Council are men of peace. Bring your injured to us. We will treat them with our white magic and bind up their wounds. We of the Council live only to serve you." As he finished speaking he removed his toga and started ripping it into strips for bandages.

It was a grandstand play, but it worked. As the wounded crowded to the rostrum, Mary took charge. Impressing a group of matrons into service, she sent one detail into a temple to find ewers and fill them with water at a nearby fountain. Another was put to work making bandages. A third broke out our soap.

As the sufferers edged forward she lined them up and bullied her haughty assistants into swabbing out plebeian gashes with that makeshift antiseptic, scrubbing dust-grimed faces and popping hard candies into the mouths of squalling children. Then she herself swathed the worst hurts in bandages which she fastened in place with—

"Safety pins!" I whooped, while I helped her as best I could. "Mary, you're a genius!"

Well, the swabbing made the wounded feel better. The scrubbing certainly made them *look* better. The candies induced the kids to forget their terror and stop yelling. As for the crude, king-size safety pins, they created a real sensation!

Soon every bandaged person was the center of an admiring, gesticulating throng. Women, particularly, were fascinated by the supremely simple fastening. This was the demonstration I had hoped for. *This was getting the customer to try on the suit!* This really did the trick which no amount of talk could ever have hoped to accomplish. Every one of the wounded was a walking advertisement as he or she circulated among the

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mob, proudly showing off our magic.

Just then Cassius came puffing up. He was dressed in a drab cloak which had been torn almost to shreds. He had a nasty lump on his noble dome, but he was jubilant.

"How did I do?" he asked Lepidus.

"You are a better heckler than Cicero, Gaius Cassius," beamed the Chairman, pounding him on his lean back, and then trying to kiss him.

"You must act quickly." Cassius ducked neatly. "Before the usurper has time to recover and marshal his troops. "Ask the mob to choose its ruler *now!*"

LEPIDUS looked at me. He had memorized a resounding speech for this occasion. I shook my head. Then I climbed up on the beak of a captured ship, one of the "rostra" which had originally given this place its name, and yelled myself hoarse demanding attention. Finally I got it.

Jumping down, I stepped behind Hugh and held my hands over his head.

The milling plebs got the idea instantly. Twenty thousand voices united in a "Boo!" which sent the pigeons in whirling flight. Twenty thousand fists shot out with the thumbs pointing grimly downward.

Hugh bowed his head. I knew he was wishing to be any place in the universe except ancient Rome.

I turned to Lepidus. Octavian stepped forward to block my path but Mary caught his arm. This allowed me to sidestep him without appearing to do so.

I held my hands over the fat man's bandaged, safety-pinned head.

Workers' red caps and even the chaplets of many of the patricians flew into the air. Yells, whistles and women's shrill screams made an appalling uproar in that crowded place. Again twenty thousand fists went out . . . with their thumbs pointing toward the sky!

"Lepidus! Lepidus! Lepidus!" roared the mob, speaking in its own best interest for perhaps the first time in history.

And, as the Romans roared out their choice of a second republic instead of an empire, I began to feel that awful tremor in the air and see that thickening of the light which I recalled so well. We had done it! This was a time crisis!

I took one look at Mary. She still clung to Octavian's arm. Already she had managed to replace the frown on his face with a smile but he continued to eye me speculatively. I looked for Larry. He was standing arm in arm with Cassius and Brutus and yelling *"Ave Lepidus!"* with the best of them. I took a last fond survey of the hysterical, dancing mob. They all belonged here. But Bill Lake didn't!

I screwed my eyes tight, did my poor best to concentrate and whispered:

"Nineteen-Fifty, here I come!"

* * * * *

I opened my eyes at last . . . to find myself facing a bewildered Hugh in the midst of the age-old, empty ruins of the Forum.

"I guess I just managed to squeak out of that one," he said with a look on his face which was a cross between that of a naughty boy caught stealing jam and of Lucifer being thrown out of Paradise.

"Me too!" I tried to grin. "That Octavian had a mean look in his eye."

"Where are we now?" He sat down on a fallen column and held his head in his hands. "Oh, golly! Where have we got to this time?"

"My guess is we're just about back where we started."

"But that's impossible." He jumped up, his eyes wild. "The atom bomb fell, don't you remember?"

"Not on this time track. We made a few changes back there, don't *you* remember?"

"Oh!" He took his time getting this through his thick skull. "But then the world's all different. We'll be strangers."

"I should think so." I scratched my head. "And yet Rome—what I can see of it from here—looks about the same as it used to."

"Could it be possible?" Hope dawned in those miserable eyes.

"Let's go see."

Well, the buildings seemed in better

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repair. They didn't lean against each other every which way. The people we passed, especially the children, looked cleaner, healthier and better dressed than I remembered them. Maybe, though, that was because of my recent contact with the indescribable filth of most of anicent Rome.

Otherwise, however, modern Rome still seemed much as I remembered it. There were the smiling push cart peddlers, the orange peels in the gutters and the distant sound of accordion music. Even the public buildings and the ruins of the Colosseum looked as they should. The only things out of place were Hugh's purple toga and my tunic.

"Funny!" he said. "There's our hotel. It's had a coat of paint."

"Let's ask if Professor Gordon is registered."

"You're crazy." But he followed me into the lobby. On the register, surely enough, we found Gordon's neat Spencerian signature.

We went up. Gordon answered our ring, wearing that old smoking jacket. He must have bought a toupee and dyed his hair and beard since we last had seen him. I couldn't help wondering what Prexy Henderson would say about that. Otherwise, he seemed unchanged.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen." He saw at once that we were Americans, despite our garb. "What can I do for you?"

"You *are* Professor Elisha Gordon, of Hutter University?" I ventured.

"Certainly. Come in! Come in!"

"You don't remember either of us?"

"Can't say I do, especially in those masquerade costumes. Former students of mine, perhaps? I have a rather poor memory and physiques and even temperaments are often greatly changed by time and environment."

I shot a look at myself in the dresser mirror. I did look older. Fitter, too, and somehow more mature than I remembered. I tried again:

"This is the year Nineteen-Fifty, isn't it?"

"Naturally! Look, is this some sort of joke?"

"We're dead serious," Hugh cut in, "but we're lost, somehow. Tell me: Is Mary Peale in some of your classes?"

"Yes. Yes indeed. A brilliant girl. In fact, I'm expecting her and a classmate to drop in shortly. Won't you wait?"

"And Larry Adams?"

"Yes. Of course. Another fine student. Do you know him?"

"How about William Lake?" I asked with a shiver.

"No-o-o." He pursed his lips. "Don't recall that name."

"Or—or Hugh Woltman?" Hugh was biting his lips.

"Sit down, professor," I said quietly. "You're due for a shock."

AND there, as the sun sank behind the Colosseum, we told our story, disjointedly at first, then with the words tumbling over each other.

At first the professor listened with a smile, sure we were pulling his leg. Later he grew intent. Stabbed that forefinger at us. Barked questions. Raised objections which we overrode.

Mary and Larry—or their doubles—drifted in after a bit. I had to pinch Hugh to keep him from going over and taking his old place on the floor at her feet. They hadn't the slightest idea who we were, of course. How could they? Their ancestors had come normally through the generations. We had balled everything up by ducking across a time crisis fissure. We back tracked to bring them up-to-date on our adventures.

By the time we had finished, darkness had fallen and we all were at the bottoms of our third bottles of beer. That was the one real difference I noted in *this* Mary. She liked beer. Then Gordon started to lecture, stamping up and down the carpet as of yore.

"Either you gentlemen are trying to perpetrate the world's greatest hoax—which I can't believe—or you are telling the truth, which I can't believe," he began. "Yes, I am familiar with Bartlett's time track theories although I always considered them a bit, shall I say, infantile. We think of time travel speculation as a bit of mental gymnastic in the study of paradoxes. You insist those

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theories are capable of proof. *Hmmm!*" He paced some more until Hugh said:

"Then, professor, your world is in no danger of an atomic war?"

"Of course not. Utterly ridiculous. We use atomic fission for power, not for weapons. Also, a world government has been functioning for more than a thousand years. Wars are something we read about in the ancient history books—and can't understand."

"Has a balance been achieved between the Visceratonic, Somatotonic and Cerebrotonic elements of human nature?" I wanted to know.

"Naturally. Naturally. That came about during the period you say you visited, in the Chairmanship of Lepidus and, after his death, of Octavian."

"Can you tell me the name of Octavian's wife?" I barely whispered.

"Why, it was the same as mine," Mary spoke up. "A very unusual name for a Roman woman, isn't it? Most of them had numbers instead of names, didn't they?"

"Yes, Roman girls usually were called 'Prima,' 'Quinta' or 'Octavia' to show they were the first, fifth or eighth child in a family, and so on," I agreed.

"But this I can't understand, professor." I came back to the main puzzle. "If we made any major change in the time track back there, the course of history should have been entirely different, according to Bartlett. Conditions in *this* Nineteen-Fifty should be alien to us. Yet things seem much the same in many ways. How come?"

"It is because Bartlett was wrong, as I have always suspected," he said. "Miss Peale!" Those piercing owl eyes which now needed no spectacles swivelled in her direction. "You are minoring in ecology. Tell us, please, what happens if a river bed becomes obstructed, by a landslide, let us say."

"Why the river cuts its way through the obstruction or makes a detour by the easiest way and returns to its old channel."

"The chances of its cutting an entirely new bed are negligible?"

"Yes. As the poet Swinburne said. 'Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea.'"

"Well put, Miss Peale. That is exactly the analogy which Bartlett forgot when he compared time to a river. He thought that every crisis gave time the choice of two completely divergent channels. That is arrant nonsense. There would be a temporary change of course only."

"Hold on," Larry objected. "I'm way beyond my depth already."

"Put it this way," said Gordon. "I suspect that, if we asked them, these gentlemen would give us an entirely different version of ancient history than the one we know. Probably they would say that Antony, Octavian and Lepidus formed their Triumvirate. That there was a brutally somatotonic Roman Empire for a while, followed by the world's relapse into barbarism. That there were wars and rumors of wars for centuries, followed, I gather, by the complete destruction of an atomic 'landslide.'

"But *our* world detoured all this. In the first, second and third centuries after Julius Caesar's death, our world was having its industrial revolution, achieving temperamental balance and controlling its warlike caveman instincts, thanks to the efforts of these gentlemen and my namesake."

THE professor paused for a moment for breath, then scowled in my direction.

"I know what you are thinking!" He jabbed that forefinger at me. "You are thinking that, without wars, pestilences and famines, our world should have a gadgetry far superior to yours. We should be bouncing around like fleas in thousand-mile-an-hour planes and huddling in skyscrapers five hundred stories high.

"But don't forget that we developed machines two thousand years ago. We are accustomed to them by this time! After our remote ancestors built enough of them to make life pleasant and abundant for everyone, they relaxed. They spent their time enjoying life and in developing the important social sciences like sociology instead of the so-

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called exact sciences like physics and chemistry. We almost made a cult out of Visceratonia. We jogged along very pleasantly, thank you. The result is that our world has a superficial resemblance to the one you knew. I assure you, however, that it is utterly different, and much more comfortable!"

"But you resemble the Professor Gordon we knew," Hugh stammered. "And Mary—Miss Peale—and Mr. Adams seem identical with our old friends. You shouldn't be here at all."

"Why?" The professor regarded him quizzically.

"Why, because—" Hugh floundered and grew silent.

"Perhaps you gentlemen are the ones who shouldn't be here."

"That's just the point," I bumbled. "Why did we come back *here?* Why didn't we return to our own world after it had been wrecked by the atomic bombs?"

"Because you haven't any world," he said.

"But, by Jupiter," I yelled at him, "you must be having some sort of time crisis or we never could have escaped to your world!"

"Oh! That!" He walked back and forth, back and forth until I almost went mad. "Yes. Yes indeed. That must be it. In fact, that is why we are returning to the States tomorrow.

"You see, young man, there has been a growing interest in technology recently. The exact sciences are beginning to move ahead once more. The United Nations is launching the first space ship to Mars next Monday and my seminar class has been invited to witness the take-off at New York. There's your crisis. Things will be much different after interplanetary travel has been established."

There didn't seem much more to say after that. Professor Gordon invited Hugh and me to return to America with him. He hinted we might get some lucrative lecture engagements. Then he shooed us all out of the room so he could write notes on our conversation.

Hugh eased over toward Mary as we left the hotel. But I had his number now—and mine too. I blocked him neatly and took her arm.

"Let's go somewhere and have a bite to eat," I said. "I want to tell you more about Mrs. Octavian, your ancestor."

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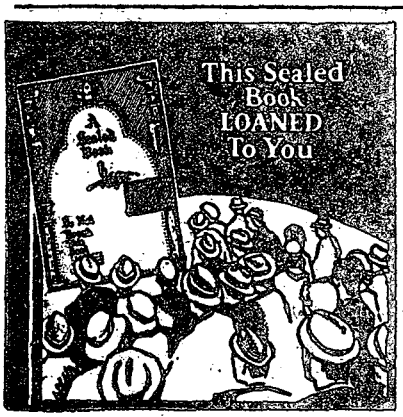
By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL



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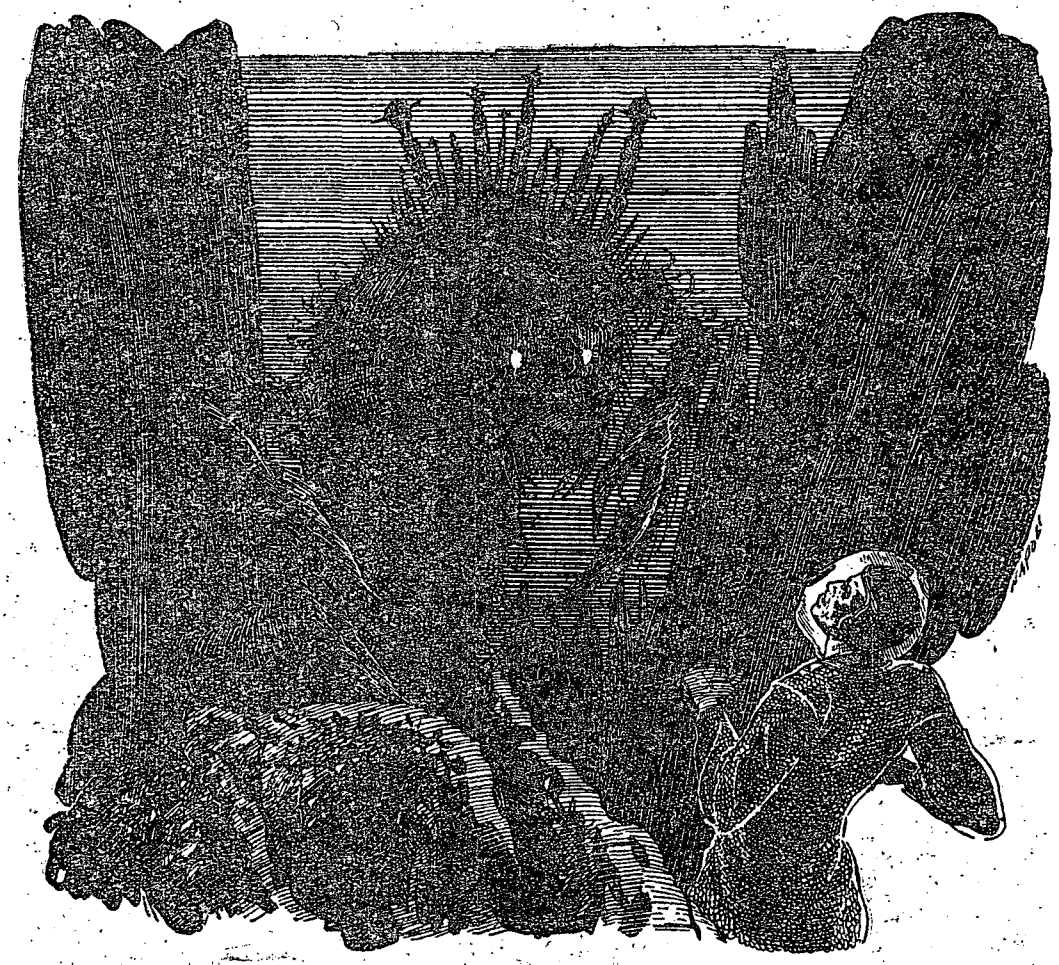

There was no mistaking the rattle of claws

A Walk in the Dark

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

ROBERT ARMSTRONG had walked just over two miles, as far as he could judge, when his torch failed. He stood still for a moment, unable to believe that such a misfortune could really have befallen him. Then, half maddened with rage, he hurled the useless instrument away. It landed somewhere in the darkness, disturbing the silence of this little world. A metallic echo came ringing back from the low hills. Then all was quiet again.

This, thought Armstrong, was the ultimate misfortune. Nothing more could

Fear Stalks the Byways of a Lonely Planet!

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happen to him now. He was even able to laugh bitterly at his luck, and resolved never again to imagine that the fickle goddess had ever favoured him. Who would have believed that the only tractor at Camp IV would have broken down when he was just setting off for Port Sanderson? He recalled the frenzied repair work, the relief when the second start had been made—and the final debacle when the caterpillar track had jammed hopelessly.

It was no use then regretting the lateness of his departure: he could not have foreseen these accidents and it was still a good four hours before the *Canopus* took off. He *had* to catch her, whatever happened: no other ship would be touching at this world for another month. Apart from the urgency of his business, four more weeks on this out-of-the-way planet were unthinkable.

There had been only one thing to do. It was lucky that Port Sanderson was little more than six miles from the camp—not a great distance, even on foot. He had been forced to leave all his equipment behind, but it could follow on the next ship and he could manage without it. The road was poor, merely stamped out of the rock by one of the Board's hundred-ton crushers, but there was no fear of going astray.

Even now, he was in no real danger, though he might well be too late to catch the ship. Progress would be slow for he dare not risk losing the road in this region of canyons and enigmatic tunnels that had never been explored. It was, of course, pitch dark. Here at the edge of the Galaxy the stars were so few and scattered that their light was negligible. The strange crimson sun of this lonely world would not rise for many hours, and although five of the little moons were in the sky they could barely be seen by the unaided eye. Not one of them could even cast a shadow.

Armstrong was not the man to bewail his luck for long. He began to walk slowly along the road, feeling its texture with his feet. It was, he knew, fairly straight except where it wound through Carver's Pass. He wished he had a stick or something to probe the way before him, but he would have to rely for guidance on the feel of the ground.

IT was terribly slow at first, until he gained confidence. He had never known how difficult it was to walk in a straight line. Although the feeble stars gave him his bearings, again and again he found himself stumbling among the virgin rocks at the edge of the crude roadway. He was traveling in long zigzags that took him to alternate sides of the road. Then he would stub his toes against the bare rock and grope his way back on to the hard-packed surface once again.

Presently it settled down to a routine. It was impossible to estimate his speed: he could only struggle along and hope for the best. There were four miles to go—four miles and as many hours. It should be easy enough, unless he lost his way. But he dared not think of that.

Once he had mastered the technique he could afford the luxury of thought. He could not pretend that he was enjoying the experience, but he had been in much worse positions before. As long as he remained on the road, he was perfectly safe. He had been hoping that as his eyes became adapted to the starlight he would be able to see the way, but he now knew that the whole journey would be blind. The discovery gave him a vivid sense of his remoteness from the heart of the Galaxy. On a night as clear as this, the skies of almost any other plant would have been blazing with stars. Here at this outpost of the Universe the sky held perhaps a hundred faintly gleaming points of lights, as useless as the five ridiculous moons on which no one had ever bothered to land.

A slight change in the road interrupted his thoughts. Was there a curve here, or had he veered off to the right again? He moved very slowly along the invisible and ill-defined border. Yes, there was no mistake: the road was bending to the left. He tried to remember its appearance in the day time, but he had only seen it once before. Did this mean that he was nearing the Pass? He

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hoped so, for the journey would then be half completed.

He peered ahead into the blackness but the ragged line of the horizon told him nothing. Presently he found that the road had straightened itself again and his spirits sank. The entrance to the Pass must still be some way ahead: there were at least four more miles to go.

Four miles! How ridiculous the distance seemed! How long would it take the *Canopus* to travel four miles? He doubted if man could measure so short an interval of time. And how many trillions of miles had he, Robert Armstrong, traveled in his life? It must have reached a staggering total by now, for in the last twenty years he had scarcely stayed more than a month at a time on any single world. This very year, he had twice made the crossing of the Galaxy, and that was a notable journey even in these days of the phantom drive.

He tripped over a loose stone, and the jolt brought him back to reality. It was no use, here, thinking of ships that could eat up the light-years. He was facing nature, with no weapons but his own strength and skill.

It was strange that it took him so long to identify the real cause of his uneasiness. The last four weeks had been very full, and the rush of his departure, coupled with the annoyance and anxiety caused by the tractor's breakdowns, had driven everything else from his mind. Moreover, he had always prided himself on his hard-headedness and lack of imagination. Until now, he had forgotten all about that first evening at the base, when the crews had regaled him with the usual tall yarns concocted for the benefit of newcomers.

It was then that the old base clerk had told the story of his walk by night from Port Sanderson to the camp, and of what had trailed him through Carver's Pass, keeping always beyond the limit of his torchlight.

ARMSTRONG, who had heard such tales on a score of worlds, had paid it little attention at the time. This planet, after all, was known to be uninhabited. But logic could not dispose of the matter as easily as that. Suppose, after all, there was some truth in the old man's fantastic tale?

It was not a pleasant thought, and Armstrong did not intend to brood upon it. But he knew that if he dismissed it out of hand, it would continue to prey on his mind. The only way to conquer imaginary fears was to face them boldly: he would have to do that now.

His strongest argument was the complete barrenness of this world and its utter desolation, though against that one could set many counter-arguments, as indeed the old clerk had done. Man had only lived on this planet for twenty years, and much of it was still unexplored. No one could deny that the tunnels out in the waste-land were rather puzzling, but everyone believed them to be volcanic vents. Though, of course, life often crept into such places. With a shudder he remembered the giant polyps that had snared the first explorers of *Vargon III.*

It was all very inconclusive: suppose, for the sake of argument, one granted the existence of life here. What of that?

The vast majority of life forms in the Universe were completely indifferent to man. Some, of course, like the gas-beings of Alcoran or the roving wave-lattices of Shandaloon, could not even detect him but passed through or around him as if he did not exist. Others were merely inquisitive, some embarrassingly friendly. There were few indeed that would attack unless provoked.

Nevertheless, it was a grim picture that the old stores clerk had painted. Back in the warm, well-lighted smoking-room, with the drinks going round, it had been easy enough to laugh at it. But here in the darkness, miles from any human settlement, it was very different.

It was almost a relief when he stumbled off the road again and had to grope with his hands until he found it once more. This seemed a very rough patch, and the road was scarcely distinguishable from the rocks around. In a few minutes, however, he was safely on his way again.

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It was unpleasant to see how quickly his thoughts returned to the same disquieting subject. Clearly it was worrying him more than he cared to admit.

He drew consolation from one fact: it had been quite obvious that no one at the base had believed the old fellow's story. Their questions and banter had proved that. At the time, he had laughed as loudly as any of them. After all, what *was* the evidence? A dim shape, just seen in the darkness, that might well have been an oddly formed rock. And the curious clicking noise that had so impressed the old man. Anyone could imagine such sounds at night if they were sufficiently overwrought. If it had been hostile, why hadn't the creatures come any closer?

"Because it was afraid of my light," the old chap had said.

Well, that was plausible enough: it would explain why nothing had ever been seen in the daytime. Such a creature might live underground, only emerging at night. Hang it, why was he taking the old idiot's ravings so seriously! Armstrong got control of his thoughts again. If he went on this way, he told himself angrily, he would soon be seeing and hearing a whole menagerie of monsters.

There was, of course, one factor that disposed of the ridiculous story at once. It was really very simple: he felt sorry he hadn't thought of it before. What would such a creature live on? There was not even a trace of vegetation on the whole of the planet. He laughed to think that the bogy could be disposed of so easily—and in the same instant felt annoyed with himself for not laughing aloud. If he was so sure of his reasoning, why not whistle, or sing, or do anything to keep up his spirits? He put the question fairly to himself as a test of his manhood. Half-ashamed, he had to admit that he was still afraid—afraid because "there *might* be something in it, after all." But at least his analysis had done him some good.

IT would have been better if he had left it there, and remained half-convinced by his argument. But a part of his mind was still busily trying to break down his careful reasoning. It succeeded only too well, and when he remembered the plant-beings of Xantil Major the shock was so unpleasant that he stopped dead in his tracks.

Now the plant-beings of Xantil were not in any way horrible: they were in fact extremely beautiful creatures. But what made them appear so distressing now was the knowledge that they could live for indefinite periods with no food whatsoever. All the energy they needed for their strange lives they extracted from cosmic radiation—and that was almost as intense here as anywhere else in the universe.

He had scarcely thought of one example before others crowded into his mind and he remembered the life form on Trantor Beta, which was the only one known capable of directly utilizing atomic energy. That too had lived on an utterly barren world, very much like this. . . .

Armstrong's mind was rapidly splitting into two distinct portions, one half trying to convince the other and neither wholly succeeding. He did not realize how far his morale had gone until he found himself holding his breath lest it conceal any sound from the darkness about him. Angrily, he cleared his mind of the rubbish that had been gathering there and turned once more to the immediate problem.

There was no doubt that the road was slowly rising, and the silhouette of the horizon seemed much higher in the sky. The road began to twist, and suddenly he was aware of great rocks on either side of him. Soon only a narrow ribbon of sky was still visible, and the darkness became, if possible, even more intense.

Somehow, he felt safer with the rock walls surrounding him. It meant that he was protected except in two directions. Also, the road had been leveled more carefully and it was easy to keep to it. Best of all, he knew now that the journey was more than half completed.

For a moment his spirits began to

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rise. Then, with maddening perversity, his mind went back into the old grooves again. He remembered that it was on the far side of Carver's Pass that the old clerk's adventure had taken place, if it had ever happened at all.

In half a mile, he would be out in the open again, out of the protection of these sheltering rocks. The thought seemed doubly horrible now and he felt already a sense of nakedness. He could be attacked from any direction, and he would be utterly helpless.

Until now, he had still retained some self-control. Very resolutely he had kept his mind away from the one fact that gave some colour to the old man's tale—the single piece of evidence that had stopped the banter in the crowded room back at the camp and brought a sudden hush upon the company. Now, as Armstrong's will weakened, he recalled again the words that had struck a momentary chill even in the warm comfort of the base building.

The little clerk had been very insistent on one point. He had never heard any sound of pursuit from the dim shape sensed rather than seen at the limit of his light. There was no scuffling of claws or hooves on rock, nor ever the clatter of displaced stones. It was as if, so the old man had declared in that solemn manner of his, "as if the thing that was following could see perfectly in the darkness, and had many small legs or pads so that it could move swiftly and easily over the rock, like a giant caterpillar or one of the carpet-things of *Kralkor II*."

Yet, although there had been no noise of pursuit, there had been one sound that the old man had caught several times. It was so unusual that its very strangeness made it doubly ominous. It was a faint but horribly persistent *clicking*.

The old fellow had been able to describe it very vividly—much too vividly for Armstrong's liking now.

"Have you ever listened to a large insect crunching its prey?" he said. "Well, it was just like that. I imagine that a crab makes exactly the same noise with its claws when it clashes them together. It was a—what's the word? A *chitinous* sound."

AT this point, Armstrong remembered laughing loudly. (Strange, how it was all coming back to him now.) But no-one else had laughed, though they had been quick to do so earlier. Sensing the change of tone, he had sobered at once and asked the old man to continue his story.

It had been quickly told. The next day, a party of sceptical technicians had gone into the no-man's-land beyond Carver's Pass. They were not sceptical enough to leave their guns behind, but they had no cause to use them for they found no trace of any living thing. There were the inevitable pits and tunnels, glistening holes down which the light of the torches rebounded endlessly until it was lost in the distance, but the planet was riddled with them.

Though the party found no sign of life, it discovered one thing it did not like at all. Out in the barren and unexplored land beyond the Pass they had come upon an even larger tunnel than the rest. Near the mouth of that tunnel was a massive rock, half embedded in the ground. And the sides of that rock had been worn away, as if it had been used as an enormous whetstone!

No less than five of those present had seen this disturbing rock. None of them could explain it satisfactorily as a natural formation, but they still refused to accept the old man's story. Armstrong had asked them if they had ever put it to the test. There had been an uncomfortable silence. Then big Andrew Hargraves had said: "Hell, who'd walk out to the Pass at night just for fun!" and had left it at that.

Indeed, there was no other record of anyone walking from Port Sanderson to the camp by night, or for that matter by day. During the hours of light, no unprotected human being could live in the open beneath the rays of the enormous, lurid sun that seemed to fill half the sky. And no one would walk six miles, wearing radiation armour, if the tractor was available.

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Armstrong felt that he was leaving the Pass. The rocks on either side were falling away, and the road was no longer as firm and well-packed as it had been. He was coming out into the open plain once more, and somewhere not far away in the darkness was that enigmatic pillar that might have been used for sharpening monstrous fangs or claws. It was not a reassuring thought.

Feeling distinctly worried now, Armstrong made a great effort to pull himself together. He would try and be rational again: he would think of business, the work he had done at the camp—anything but this infernal place. For a while, he succeeded quite well. But presently, with a maddening persistence, every train of thought came back to the same point. He could not get out of his mind the picture of that inexplicable rock and its appalling possibilities..

The ground was quite flat again, and the road drove on straight as an arrow. There was one gleam of consolation: Port Sanderson could not be much more than two miles away. Armstrong had no idea how long he had been on the road. Unfortunately his watch was not illuminated and he could only guess at the passage of time. With any luck, the *Canopus* should not take off for another two hours at least. But he could not be sure, and now another fear began to enter his mind, the dread that he might see a vast constellation of lights rising swiftly into the sky ahead, and know that all this agony of mind had been in vain.

He was not zig-zagging so badly now, and seemed to be able to anticipate the edge of the road before stumbling off it. It was probable, he cheered himself by thinking, that he was travelling almost as fast as if he had a light. If all went well, he might be nearing Port Sanderson in thirty minutes, a ridiculously small space of time. How he would laugh at his fears when he strolled into his already reserved stateroom in the *Canopus*, and felt that peculiar quiver as the phantom drive hurled the great ship far out of this system, back to the clustered star-clouds near the center of the Galaxy, back towards Earth itself, which he had not seen for so many years.

ONE day, he told himself, he really must visit Earth again. All his life he had been making the promise, but always there had been the same answer—lack of time. Strange, wasn't it, that such a tiny planet should have played so enormous a part in the development of the Universe, should even have come to dominate worlds far wiser and more intelligent than itself!

Armstrong's thoughts were harmless again, and he felt calmer. The knowledge that he was nearing Port Sanderson was immensely reassuring, and he deliberately kept his mind on familiar, unimportant matters. Carver's Pass was already far behind and with it that thing he no longer intended to recall. One day, if he ever returned to this world, he would visit the pass in the day time and laugh at his fears. In twenty minutes now, they would have joined the nightmares of his childhood.

It was almost a shock, though one of the most pleasant he had ever known, when he saw the lights of Port Sanderson come up over the horizon. The curvature of this little world was very deceptive: it did not seem right that a planet with a gravity almost as great as Earth's should have a horizon so close at hand. One day, someone would have to discover what lay at this world's core to give it so great a density.

Perhaps the many tunnels would help, it was an unfortunate turn of thought, but the nearness of his goal had robbed it of terror now. Indeed, the thought that he might really be in danger seemed to give his adventure a certain piquancy and heightened interest. Nothing could happen to him now, with ten minutes to go and the lights of the Port in sight.

A few minutes later, his feelings changed abruptly when he came to the sudden bend in the road. He had forgotten the chasm that caused this detour, and added half a mile to the journey. Well, what of it? An extra half-mile would make no difference now—another ten minutes, at the most.

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It was very disappointing when the lights of the city vanished. Armstrong had not remembered the hill which the road was skirting: perhaps it was only a low ridge, scarcely noticeable in the daytime. But by hiding the lights of the port it had taken away his chief talisman and left him again at the mercy of his fears.

Very unreasonable, his intelligence told him, he began to think how horrible it would be if anything happened now, so near the end of the journey. He kept the worst of his fear at bay for a while, hoping desperately that the lights of the city would soon reappear. But as the minutes dragged on, he realized that the ridge must be longer than he imagined. He tried to cheer himself by the thought that the city would be all the nearer when he saw it again, but somehow logic seemed to have failed him now. For presently he found himself doing something he had not stooped to, even out in the waste by Carver's Pass.

He stopped, turned slowly round, and with bated breath listened until his lungs were nearly bursting.

The silence was uncanny, considering how near he must be to the Port. There was certainly no sound from behind him. Of course there wouldn't be, he told himself angrily. But he was immensely relieved. The thought of that faint and insistent clicking had been haunting him for the last hour.

So friendly and familiar was the noise that did reach him at last that the anti-climax almost made him laugh aloud. Drifting through the still air from a source clearly not more than a mile away came the sound of a landing-field tractor, perhaps one of the machines loading the *Canopus* itself. In a matter of seconds, thought Armstrong, he would be around this ridge with the port only a few hundred yards ahead. The journey was nearly ended.—In a few moments, this evil plain would be no more than a fading nightmare.

It seemed terribly unfair: so little time, such a small fraction of a human life, was all he needed now. But the gods have always been unfair to man, and now they were enjoying their little jest. For there could be no mistaking the rattle of monstrous claws in the darkness *ahead of him.*

THE ROUND-THE-WORLD BOMBER

(Concluded from page 103)

or engineer who could read those mathematical portions was handed all the information needed. All that remained to be done was to do it.

Actually, of course, the project was then and still is a long way from the construction hall. For example Dr. Sänger developed a very pretty method of feeding the fuel from the tanks into the rocket-motor. But it would take quite some time to make his method work.

Another point, which the non-scientist was likely to overlook, was that the round-the-world flight was based on an exhaust velocity of 4000 meters per second, which is roughly twice that of the V-2 motor. This is not really impossible but again it would take manpower and money and then some more money and time, time and then some more time to attain this performance.

And finally, if all this were done the enemy would know the location of Grand Base by about the time a decision was reached as to its site. Grand Base certainly wouldn't be left unmolested, no matter how well it was protected.

Meanwhile the Russians seem to have scattered rumors that they are actively engaged in following the Sänger-Bredt report. At least that is the simplest explanation of certain newspaper stories.

If they actually were doing so it would be interesting—and not especially dangerous—to watch the development. In the meantime anybody can try to improve upon that once *Top Secret* report. Because now it can be read by anyone who can read German.

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(Continued from page 7)

which have been dissected in secret government laboratories.

If by this refusal to believe in little green aliens we are traitors to certain elements in stf, well we can't help it. We simply don't believe in them and that's that—and we won't until we see some.

Nor do we believe that the Saucers are of Russian origin. Russia may have them but if the discs seen over the United States *were* Soviet air-vessels they would have been seen over more of our large cities and factory-laden industrial areas—districts which they have thus far scrupulously avoided.

Furthermore, if they were Russian, there would have been a tremendous hue and cry, from Congress right on down. And they would have been spotted by watchers sent out to locate their routes—even if they came over the Pole. No, we can't take that one either.

Although our reasoning is of a negative nature—it has to be in view of the lack of official confirmation and personal sight of even one Saucer—we feel almost certain that the big discs are ours and that they are already well along the road of useful development.

They have been seen for the most part in the Northwest (within easy flight range of some of our largest airplane factories), in the northeastern Midwest area around Wright Field (the great Air Force experimental base), in the Southwest (fairly close to the vast desert rocket and other experimental bases) and in areas of the Southeast reasonably close to the Alabama region that supports Maxwell Field and other huge Air Force installations.

How Do They Look?

Apparently they are big—somewhere between one and two hundred feet in diameter according to the most reliable observers. They seem to be able to attain speeds greater than anything except that of the experimental rocket plane FX-1. They seem to be able to vary speed and direction and altitude with an ease no other form of aircraft has yet attained.

According to one observer, who recently got a good look at a low-flying Saucer over the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania, the craft had a stationary outer rim, a rapidly rotating inner ring and a central core which was stationary. The underside of the central core was fitted with some sort of ports or windows, symmetrically arranged. Behind the whole craft as it moved was some sort of metallic streamer. It made a sharp droning noise as it passed overhead, moving west.

What sort of craft can it be? Your guess, again, is as good as ours. But when we read this description we thought at once of a musical top with its stationary and rotating parts and its sharp drone.

Bacon's Idea

Something stirred in our memory and we remembered a lecture we heard years ago by a man who gave his life and fortune to a study of the works, in and out of cypher, the theories and the experiments of Sir Francis Bacon, the great Elizabethan, scientist-philosopher and sometime reputed "real" author of Shakespeare's finer dramas.

According to this lecturer, whose name was Prescott, Sir Francis gave in his writings a practical description of a "flying machine" which operated through a sort of top on what amounts to an almost supersonic scale. We were interested but inclined to credit the device with about the same practicality we accord to some of Leonardo da Vinci's gadgetry.

Now we don't know. Perhaps the old boy had something that, in the light of modern scientific development, has proved eminently practical. At any rate we have a hunch our Air Force has something. If we are to apply any sort of logic to our sadly scrambled defense policies at present, it can only be through their possession of the Flying Saucers.

All we have said is mere conjecture—but we have a hunch we'll know more by the fall of 1952. Remember, there's a Presidential election that November!

OUR NEXT ISSUE

JOHN D. MACDONALD, whose rise this year to preeminence in the science fiction world through his JOURNEY FOR SEVEN (TWS, April) and WINE OF THE DREAMERS (SS, May) continues to fulfill his brilliant promise in a grand short novel for our October issue, SHADOW ON

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THE SAND, a tale of a universe beyond our ken, of our own world and of a few closely-interrelated people both of Earth and of the cosmos outside our experience.

Mr. MacDonald's universe, which inhabits our space if not our plane, is an intensely progressive and socialized one. In science and development it is as far beyond our world as, say, New York City is beyond Monrovia, the capital of Libera. But it is a universe at war with itself, with its human power balanced precariously between the League and the Center, which are, respectively, administrative and scientific bodies.

It is the scientists of the Center who discover a means of moving right out of their cosmos, through the so-called "black door" to Earth. Earth they intend to use as an untouchable base in their endless struggle with the League, much as some of our militarists conceive of using the Moon.

Their agents are trained in the uses of utter disguise and of possession of other bodies—those of Earth among them. And three of them, as forerunners toward establishing the Tellurian base, are sent through the black door to an isolated beach resort on the Gulf of Mexico, where Jerry and Fran Raymond are seeking to hold together their marriage despite the moneyed onslaught of their supposed friend, Quinn French.

Individual problems mean nothing to Amro, Massio and Faven, the emissaries of the Center. They are completely conditioned to serving the loyalties and policies and projects of their employers. And here, on the Gulf sands, they run head-on into a set of jangling personal relationships that make their apparently routine assignment the most difficult they have ever tackled.

Like all recent MacDonald long efforts, this story has just about everything—from a cosmos on the brink of disaster to a series of moving and very human emotional problems. And its drama and qualities of suspense are of the sort that will make your shirt cling to your back.

Eric Frank Russell is going to be on hand with a delightful novelet of planet pioneering entitled FIRST PERSON SINGULAR, a story which has a thoroughly unexpected twist in its tail. It tells first of the setting down of a carefully-selected young planet-developer on a dangerously immature alien planet.

It tells of his effort to improve and maintain the base made for him, of his strange mutation under the conditions in which he must live or perish, of his final selection of a mate from a group of young women selected for their roles as pioneer wives as carefully as he himself was trained.

From then on a number of other things happen—things exciting, amusing, heartwarming, terrifying. And before Mr. Russell takes leave of his pioneer pair, he has built himself and you one of the most arresting off-trail science fiction stories of 1950.

Our second scheduled novelet for October is another very different sort of science fiction story—THE TENTH DEGREE by Sam Merwin, Jr. It tells of Margot Holmes, extraordinarily successful young Hollywood star, whose marriage to the hereditary ruler of a splinter Ishmaelite Moslem sect puts both of them into a peril which has menaced the Old World for centuries and is now threatening our own.

It involves a fastness in space-time which is not of this or any other actual world, a fastness created by forgotten scientists of Central Asia as a refuge from the Golden Horde of Ghengis Khan. It is a fastness dedicated only to loot, as had been its Earthly counterpart, maintained by robberies and kidnapings that lie beyond the tracing powers of any sleuths ancient or modern.

Neither Margot nor her husband are in accord with their otherworld lords—and the actress declares a one-woman war upon her husband's enemies that results in a situation which causes incredulity to conflict jarringly with sheer terror. This is a novelet with a sneak punch that is close to a knockout.

The short stories continue to show equal promise—despite the howls of some of our perennial letter-critics who affect a contempt for any science fiction story less than 30,000 words long. But any inventory which includes work by authors like Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Robert Moore Williams, Walt Sheldon, William Morrison, Jack Vance, William F. Temple, Bolling Branham, Raymond Z. Gallun, Carter Sprague, Ken Crossen, Mack Reynolds, Erik Fennel, Rog Phillips, John D. MacDonald, Stanton Coblentz and Samuel Mines among others, should hold up at least solidly for issues to come.

We'll do our best to pick the best on hand at any rate. And Willy Ley is in the offing with a new series of his inimitable articles on tap. For the rest your Ed. will be present with his usual comment, caustic and otherwise, ably supported by the most imagina-

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tive, zaniest, most poetic, most thoughtful gang of letter-writer-inners any magazine ever boasted. October, in brief, looks like a good TWS month—we can hear those leaves falling from here.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

ONCE again the fans are gathering with Labor Day week end in view—this time heading for Portland, Oregon, scene of the 1950 World Science Fiction Convention, otherwise and unvariously known as the NORWESCON. Preparations are all but completed and those of you who feel able to add your names to the several hundred convention members already signed up should get in touch by mail or pigeon post with NORWESCON Treasurer and Chairman Ruth Newbury, whose address is P.O. Box No. 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.

It looks like a good gang running the big show this year (judging by some of the imagination and efficiency shown in their past capers) and if you can get there by any means from rocket-ship to shanks mare, do so. We certainly intend to try if our work in this corner of the country will permit us.

And now, as always, for the postcard brigade—after which, the letter-deluge.

AVERAGE UP
by Richard Sanders

Dear Sir: Congratulations on the April TWS. It rates 6.5, definitely one of your better issues and a great improvement on the February issue in every way. The stories:

1. NOCTURNE, 7.0 pts—West. Very good description and atmosphere.
2. JOURNEY FOR SEVEN, 6.6 pts—MacDonald. Good.
3. THE BORGHESE TRANSPARENCY, 6.6 pts—Sprague.
4. PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN, 6.5—Leinster. Interesting.
5. CARNIVAL OF MADNESS, 6.5—Bradbury. Typical.
6. THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS, 6.5—Blish.
7. LITTLE JOE, 6.2—Cartmill.
8. THE TIME CAVE, 6.0—Sheldon.

Illustrations were 6.6—very good, the best on pp. 48-9 (7.2) and 116-7 (7.0). The stories rated within 1.0 of each other. Best issue since December, 1949 (6.6 pts).—585 Union Street, Wytheville, Virginia.

We don't quite know how you arrive at such a precise rating, Dick—your system of scoring intangibles must rival in complexity that of Prize Fight Commissioner Eddie Eagan, currently the plague of Madison Square Garden and other points in New York State. However, we're delighted you like the issue and hope we can keep up the good work on your scale.

DRESS UP, GANG!
by Allen Newton

Dear Sir: For my money your magazine is crowding first place hard in the stf field. Keep it up. Your paean of praise on behalf of the female sex in your commentary would be more impressive and sincere if you would try to make the appearance of the mag a little better. Frankly, can you imagine the head of a university woman's club trying to hide one of your covers!—114 East 25th Street, Baltimore 18, Maryland.

No, but we sure would like to. What a five-way stretch that would be! It might be even more intriguing in an upper berth.

SHE NO KNOW HER MUTTON
By Ann B. Nelson

Dear—well, Editor (wish I knew your name!): The first story in the April issue I read was, as usual, the one with the Blish byline—and I registered keen delight. I LOVE that man's stories! Carter Sprague never lets me down either.

As for your own thoughts in your editorial—well, I hope they get the concerted attention they deserve from the sources with power to activate them. Do you know the Edward Bellamy story EQUALITY? Please get it and tell me what you think of it.—P.O. Box No. 649, Salida, Colorado.

As we announced in the April issue, our name shall be Lemuel Mutton. Glad you like Blish, et cetera. No, we don't know the Bellamy you mention but we shall order it from our Astor Place bookman immediately.

SUGGESTION
by Walter A. Coslet

Dear Editor: I noticed your comment on Ted Powell's letter in the April TWS re the possibility of your reprinting some old fantasy-stf yarns such as those by Voltaire, Swift and others in some of your mags.

First let me assure you that I'm all for it, providing you steer clear of the more commonly available titles—even though I'm of the opinion they'll be hard put to stand up to much of the current stuff, especially due to the advance of science since the stories were written.

However, I'm sure most of us would be glad to be able to get hold of copies of such antique works, regardless of how they compare. May I also suggest that you consider much of the material that appeared in magazines of the 19th century—particularly the dime and nickel novels, like the FRANK READE LIBRARY, THE NEW YORK 5c LIBRARY and THE BOYS' STAR LIBRARY?—P.O. Box No. 6, Helena, Montana.

Are you *sure* you haven't got Jonathan Swift confused with Tom Swift of Electric-Rifle and Trip-to-the-Moon fame? We must register suspicion, even though we have done some delving in the Reade epics. Remember, Coswal, at least a few of our readers are adult. Non-spoofingly, the classics-revival project is still in a nebulous stage—but we are grateful for your support.

THAT JOE!
by Joe Gibson

Dear Ed.: So Leinster's got a series now. And Blish has gone psychic. And Bradbury's been reading. This Ray is getting to be science-fiction's Milton Berle, the way he steals stuff. Tell Blish to start working on some galactic civilization yarns with a mixture of inter-stellar physics and psychic development. Use two tablecloths! And leave Brad alone—he's such a temperamental guy.

Cartmill's running into series trouble, as usual. Too few plot complications ably developed makes series stories sound like synopses for comic strips. Careful there—it was good up to now!

Your comments in The Reader Speaks on the variance of human nature should bring accolades of approval—or something like that. Haven't had my breakfast coffee yet. Man is not a rational being—he's a rationalizing being! The ironic thing about this business of seeking some neat little formula to fit humanity is that any man who stands on his own hind legs, tries to determine the good and just from the bad and unjust, does the best he can and the devil with the hindmost, actually has that formula! History shows time and again that regardless of circumstances, ideologies, monarchs and religion, these individualists are the ones who forge ahead—these hard-headed characters who aren't afraid to think and dream for themselves, let the rest fall where they may—and

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the ones the rest of humanity follows!

It'll be some crazy, hare-brained individualist, by a million-to-one, who pilots the first spaceship to the Moon. They're the ones other people pity because they seem to be striving for goals they can never achieve. But that's the secret—the striving is the life! Any time one of 'em achieves his goal, watch him squirm and sweat until he thinks up a better one to go after! To wit: "The only secrets of life and living are life and living themselves!"

That's my boy who said that. You got the pants just right, there—but what's *this* back here? Oh, no! How could you?

Edward, my boy—and I call you Edward, only because I happen to know you're not Mary Gnaedinger—there is nothing in my very fine analysis of the science fiction story which is equally and directly applicable to the detective story! You been working for chain publishers too long, boy. Only a hypothetical similarity can be said to exist between the two fields *and that's simply the result of some authors' practice* of treating science fiction in the same manner they treat detective fiction.

In detective fiction your core of hard facts and gimmicks; or "clues," suffices merely to reveal by your hero's deduction the hidden story line of the villain or the "force for evil." Inherently detective-mystery fiction is merely the balanced development of those two, good-and-bad story lines. You can hardly consider these "clues" as a hypothesis, however.

In science-fiction that core of hard facts and gimmicks becomes a motivating factor in itself—and therefore, a hypothesis. A scientist breeding giant insects is an old stf cliche; the giant insects present the hypothesis for a story. Now, depending on the moral effect the author wants in the story, he must either build one story line around those giant insects and make them the "force for evil" or build two story lines around them, using them as pawns between his good and evil forces. But whatever he does those giant insects *must stand out above all else—they* symbolize his reason for writing the story!

The same holds true if he writes about men building an interplanetary empire, or making a pioneer interstellar trip or meeting an alien race or visiting some other dimensional universe.

It's unfortunate, in some cases, that various authors do write science-fiction with much the same pattern they use in detective fiction. As you say, the balancing of the good *and evil story lines in detective fiction is one of the hardest* tricks in the business—especially since both lines must result from human motivation! But the result all too often is that detective-mystery authors fall into a rut in plot construction—their next story is constructed exactly as was their last. And, I'm afraid, some stf authors have begun to do the same thing! After all, there are some fifteen different basic plots which can be used, with variations in minor complications presenting endless possibilities. Bradbury illustrated that point very *well with story after story about Mars—and all of 'em differ*ent!

And your reply on hypotheses doesn't make much sense either! You quote your Pythagorean theorem and Newton's law "as brief as can be," yet any stf author who used those quotations in a story wouldn't impress very many readers. Your two most interesting propositions are very fine in themselves and prove the value of the punchline in the last paragraph, but otherwise how do they apply to story construction?

I repeat myself: there are a few hypotheses which can be explained briefly, because they're either so similar to the commonplace *or so familiar to stf readers from previous* stories that they can be grasped easily from a few words. But perhaps you haven't read the selections of Heinlein's "history" in the prewar magazines—your competitors—in which he developed a whole list of hypotheses into a dozen or more stories and a thousand years of speculative future "history." There, chum, was science-fiction!

Many of those stories were short stories, their dramatic motivation derived from but one simple facet of some complex hypothesis. *But those stories were all parts of a long* series depicting that mythical thousand years of history—a series which, I believe, hadn't been done since H. G. Wells followed his Outline of History with The Shape of Things to Come! Furthermore Heinlein dramatized his series. The hero of each story lived in some period of that "history." Occasionally one hero would catch sight of another. . . .

But merely taking a simple facet of a complex hypothesis to write any short story too often leads to pure mayhem. Too often that simple facet, isolated, *isn't enough to merit a story.* Too often that isolated facet results in pure farce. Take the really complex theorem that, approaching the speed of light, mass approaches infinity and time approaches zero. Think how many authors have taken the one facet, "mass approaches infinity," and written about star-ships puffing up until they swallowed the Universe! Good for sheer buffoonery, *which certainly has its place,* but hardly a good rule for serious science-fiction.

And I think if Bradbury would consider a theory in its complex entirety, such as the theory of free fall in space that he used simply in KALEIDOSCOPE, he'd develop into a whopping good novelist! In KALEIDOSCOPE, didn't he have a ship explode, spewing its crew-members in all directions? (I sent my copy to South Africa—rather difficult for me to look it up, you know.) Then the problem here wasn't free fall but communications, i.e., how to give a distress signal as you go pinwheeling across space) in a pressure suit.

If this is the story I think it was those poor devils were just out from Earth when the ship blew. And meteorites which form "shooting stars" in Earth's atmosphere are hardly bigger than grains of sand. *It would be quite a* problem to figure in your head but a ship's astrogator with *enough experience might figure how much velocity would* get an object to Earth in the time left them and from *what angle it should be launched* to run a trajectory down over a spaceport.

Ever think that spaceports would have radar plumbing the upper reaches of the atmosphere? Those meteorites are tiny but the heat they generate on contact could hull a ship! On contact in the atmosphere anyway. So keep the grim effectiveness—and then add the astrogator figuring it out, stripping an outer layer of rubber from his gloves, twisting the control knobs off the front of his breastplate—and firing *a distress signal to Earth with a sling-shot!* Have you got a better story—if a novelet—or haven't you?—24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N. J.

As usual, Joe, you've got us sweating meteorites "hardly bigger than grains of sand." And plenty of "little drops of water" as well. Once more we tend to disagree—especially on the differences you attempt to cite between the mystery and the science fiction story.

So, according to you, the mystery story's "core of hard facts and gimmicks suffices merely to reveal by your hero's deduction the hidden story line of the villain or the force for evil"? And "in science fiction that core of hard facts becomes a motivating factor in itself—and therefore a hypothesis"?

Well, too many years ago we wrote a mystery novel which saw magazine serialization, book publication, reprint ditto and the usual lesser foreign sales. As such things go it was a minor success. In it our basic hard core or gimmick was the supposed (by us) fact that a Russian princeling shortly after the defeat of Napoleon conceived and executed the idea of reproducing the victorious armies of Czar Alexander I in miniature, as the French reproduced Napoleon's Grand Armée in the Invalides in Paris. As platinum had no precious metal value at that time and was sufficiently durable for the job, he had them cast in the white metal.

The existence of this "toy" army and its appalling current value was a hypothesis in itself, however unlikely. And its existence was also the motivating force behind the entire story—in short for forces of both good and evil. We can't see this pseudo-logical supposition as being any different storywise from, say, the false uncle created by Henry Kuttner (as Keith Hammond) for his magnificent CALL HIM DEMON.

You're right about formula stories, of course. But they are no more recent in science fiction than in any other field of writing. Unfortunately they are just as frequent. We have yet to read the Heinlein

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"Future History" stories but are looking forward to doing so when they appear in book form. As you summarize it his trick is not exactly new. Certainly Dumas used it scores of times, Thackeray less often. It is, however, one only a virtuoso can handle successfully.

As for the expanding space-ships, they are in themselves ridiculous but able authors have invented such items as "overdrive" and "subspace" to get around it. Actually, to travel backward in time and therefore to exceed the speed of light probably means tapping the macrocosm, of which our entire cosmos is probably less than a molecule. To that extent it makes size (or mass) beyond human comprehension absolutely necessary, no matter whether it is achieved by blowing oneself up like a bullfrog in spring or employing some sort of matterless beam.

As for your revised Bradbury—go ahead and write it, son.

STRONG STATEMENT
by Elbert G. Rose

Dear Editor: I have just finished reading the April issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. You have finally driven me to writing a letter. Before I get any further I wish to state that I realize when I say something is good or bad that it is my opinion entirely, and whether it coincides with someone else's opinion or not is none of my doing. I do not know if my opinions are in the minority or in the majority, nor does it make any difference to me. I am entitled to my own opinion.

You make a strong statement in your editorial when you say that no system of living can work, that all systems must remain hypothetical. I cannot fully agree with you. What would have been the result if there were no constitution to these United States? There would be no great nation for us to be proud of or to be citizens of. What is this but a system of living? It is true that there have to be changes to allow for progress, but does that change the system? If this system had been kept hypothetical where would we be today? I am not promulgating any system, but I refuse to believe that if we go willy-nilly from here to there we will fulfill any purpose in life.

You also asked for this. You want to know how we liked James Blish's "There Shall Be No Darkness." I didn't. There is no complaint about the writing. It was very good. I don't like the subject matter, and furthermore I don't have time to waste reading that type of story.

Here is another one I didn't like, "Carnival of Madness" by Ray Bradbury. Another good writer off on the wrong foot. In your companion magazine you also had one, "The Lady Is a Witch" by Norman A. Daniels. Another of the same. If you have to print this type of story why not put them all in one magazine so that some of us could get what we like without having a lot of stuff in the way and using up space. Also you would only lose the sale of one magazine instead of both.

I don't like to be reminded of the asinine superstitions of the past, but rather would I be given an insight into the possibilities and imaginings of the present and future. I could go on, but as you must have gathered by now I don't want what I call fantasy, and furthermore I won't buy it.—Delta, Colorado.

As to the endurance to date of our Constitution, it is our strong editorial hunch that the reason this great document has remained effective lies in the fact that it is probably the greatest single enemy of system ever promulgated by civilized man. It allows every citizen to live pretty much as he likes within the limits of his talent and training and within the limits of such laws as prevent his becoming a public danger or nuisance.

Even as recently as 1933 Americans generally showed their refusal to let the Constitution inflict regulation when they repealed the Prohibition Amendment by popular referendum. Our strength lies in our refusal as a people to permit systems to be inflicted upon us by law.

As for your views on fantasy—well, they're yours and we regret very much that you failed to enjoy the stories in question. Here's hoping you find enough pseudo-science in the current issue to please you.

COUNTERBLAST
by Arthur C. Clarke

Dear Editor: I don't mind purely literary criticisms of my stories (I do, really!) but when Messrs. Smith and Ryan try to shoot holes in the science of THIRTY SECONDS—THIRTY DAYS, they've got it coming to them.

So Mr. Smith thinks that the temperature of outer space is "so tremendous that it can melt solid steel," does he? Well, well! I'd like to know where he picked up that one: probably through reading that the temperature of interstellar gas is around 10,000 degrees. However, that's so incredibly rare that one would freeze to death in it pretty quickly if one had no other source of heat.

For Mr. Smith's information, the average temperature of a body near Venus would be about 130 degrees F—which isn't any more than Death Valley can do when it tries (If he wants to see the calculations, I'll refer him to Equation IX.1 in the mathematical appendix to my INTERPLANETARY FLIGHT, which will be on sale by the time this letter appears). And it's rubbish to suppose that a body would explode on exposure to space. We're tougher than that!

Mr. Ryan on the other hand, has a good point. I'll admit it had me worried for a while. But a little figuring will show that even if you had the water (or the wine!) the amount of electrical energy needed to provide oxygen for two men would be prohibitive—you'd need currents of several hundred amps. Easy enough to get in the ordinary way, but not out of the almost radio-frequency power supply used on most modern spaceships. And the idea of using crystals for frequency control in radio sets—say, you are behind the times! Don't you know they went out in the 1970's when molecular resonance oscillators came into general use?

There just isn't any d.c. used in an up-to-date spaceship wiring system, which simplifies things enormously, and there's no practical way of getting lots of d.c. amps in a hurry. And incidentally, it isn't so easy to design an electrolytic cell to work in the absence of gravity, when the bubbles of gas will just stay put. Think it over!—Ballifants, Bishops Lydeard, Taunton, Somerset, England.

Okay, Arthur, you carry the ball a lot better than we could hope to. We hope Messrs. Smith and Ryan are properly chastened. They probably aren't at all. How about some more stories soon, British market demands notwithstanding?

PSEUDO BEEF
by Larry Rothstein

Dear Editor: Pseudo, from Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 5th Edition, is defined as follows—

1. A combining form meaning fake, falsely used to denote a. sham, b. counterfeit.

2. In modern science a deceptive resemblance to a specified thing.

Please, please, do not use this prefix to describe stories written for the science fiction field. Practically all good science fiction follows the dictum and wisely so of the man who says that imagination is the creator of ideas. My own belief is that stf writers who are worth their salt use very good science as a basis for their stories. My feeling is that they use their imagination to take off from known fact and accepted theory into the unknown worlds which lie beyond.

My own version of pseudo science is the crackpot stuff you find in a certain Sunday newspaper supplement and in

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certain stories a competitor of yours ran to my great anguish. If you must describe your stories in a way which indicates their lack of sound scientific background, won't you please use the term semiscientific? It means so much more than the gibberish implications of pseudo.

The April TWS was fair to good with nothing really exceptional. The MacDonald story was the best I've ever read which solved the problem of manning the first experimental rocket space-ships. Could he perhaps do a sequel?—308 West Clinton Street, Elmira, New York.

Although Webster's International gives a much more detailed definition of *pseudo*, Larry, in general your abbreviated one seems to cover the use of the word. Now the only problem before this house is whether science fiction is pseudo or not.

In general we believe it is—that it almost has to be. Its soundness to the reader lies more in how thoroughly the author has sought to ally it with so-called scientific realities rather than whether or not it is truth itself. The mere fact that it may some day be truth doesn't prevent it from being pseudo at present. Your dislike of the word gives rise to suspicion that you are seeking to enfold your hobby with a panoply of reality it neither possesses nor needs.

The most important single element in science fiction is plausibility, not scientific truth. Its human truthfulness must come first if it is to be convincing fiction. And *fiction* is what it is and what it is supposed to be, take it or leave it.

RAMBLING DISSERTATION
by Wayne Springett

Dear Editor: Judging from the extent and quality of your "Readers" columns, you already have as much in that line as you can reasonably handle. In spite of that fact, however, I hereby break a ten-years' silence to join that rank of guys (and occasional gals) who seem to get their main kick out of life by telling you exactly and vociferously what is and isn't what.

I have been puzzled by the fact that there isn't more appreciation shown for your rambling dissertations that introduce "The Reader Speaks." Your little discourse on Systems showed a breadth of perspective that would do credit to many a publication that would stick up its slick little nose at the very suggestion of comparison. Why not have these "editorials" signed so that the reader can give credit where it's due? I believe that a signature would encourage more reader comment on this feature.

As to stories, I particularly liked NOCTURNE, and for very good reasons. Although this boy, West, has turned out a Wonder Story in the best sense of the word, he still linked it to reality by building it around an already-known central theme—in this case, music—in such a way as to leave a lasting impression.

Instead of just one more chapter in an endless sequence of deep-space adventure at a remote distance of several centuries and light years, he has contributed ideas and information to supplement my meager earthly store without detracting in the faintest from the desired futuristic effect. Also, I get the impression that he is writing for people who relish an occasional idea—not just for overgrown Buck Rogers fans. It's the kind of thing that sticks with you.

Please count my vote as many times as your conscience will permit for the time-to-time inclusion of reprints from the classical pioneers in the stf field. There are some gems that deserve to be remembered. They should add variety and prestige to the Table of Contents, to say nothing of the monetary saving. The sooner, the quicker.

Most of my friends think that I am nuts for reading TWS, but I consider them nuts for NOT reading it; so there we are. I, at least, enjoy it. Keep on with the noble work!—Box 45, Ferry, Michigan.

We hope you find more and more thousands of sane (by your lights) people in the world, Wayne Springett, and are properly grateful for your breaking a ten-year silence. Don't wait so long, please, before writing your next.

We're still considering the matter of rerunning occasional carefully selected "classics." It may come—we hope so.

WERE-WOOF!
by Norman A. Ruggles

Dear Editor: Have just finished the April issue of TWS and would like to comment. The Blish werewolf novel was good, but it did not seem to have had the careful preparation of "Let the Finder Beware." The change from man to wolf is not made because of any similarity of structure, but because the wolf, next to man, is the most feared and dominant animal of the region.

For example, the werewolf myth? is common in Europe, while Norway and Sweden have both the werewolf and the werebear ("were" being taken from the Anglo-Saxon word "wer" meaning "man"). Similarly, Abyssinia has the were-hyena, and India has much the same myth about both the tiger and the serpent. In Japan and China, the fox bears the onus of man's transformation (see Merritt's "The Fox-Woman"). Even today, the leopardmen of W. Africa are much feared by the natives.

North America never had the werewolf in the form found in Europe. True, the Indians have many legends about changes into the form of wolf, bear, turkey, owl and many others, but the changed animal never had the extreme malignancy of his European cousin. The myths are probably a form of Totemism.

Opinion on the origin of the werewolf is divided. Hertz, in his book, "The Werewolf," says it came from the custom of wearing the skins of killed animals in winter. This would explain the remark of Herodotus about "the Neurians (people of West Russia) who change to the wolf form for a few days every year" and possibly also the appearance of Fenris in Nordic mythology. Others, notably S. Baring-Gould, think that werewolves were merely demented or berserk people who turned cannibal. Still others, notably me, know better.

Sorry if I stayed too long on the subject of werewolves, but as a charter member of the State College chapter of the Werewolves' and Vampires' Chowder and Lurking Society, I could hardly resist the real or imagined slurs on my avocation.—Dorm 23—18, State College, Pennsylvania.

For some reason the Blish novelet, AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, seems to have kicked up a bit of a fuss with a number of readers for various reasons. Personally we thought it a lulu of a werewolf yarn to which even a quasi-credible pseudo-scientific (this one was really pseudo) explanation had been adroitly hitched.

Here's wishing you a high old time, Norman, come the next high of the moon.

SATISFIED EXPECTANCY
by C. Ray Bryan

Dear Ed: After reading "There Shall Be No Darkness" in the April issue of TWS, I found myself with a sort of satisfied expectancy that I have seldom experienced. The tale was too well presented, too near reality for the reader to prevent a vague feeling of alarm from coursing through his veins in tempo with the delicious little chill chasing up and down his spine.

After reading it, I was left saying to myself, "This happened! Where or to whom I don't know, nor am I sure I want to. But it did occur."

That feeling of reality is too seldom achieved in Stfiction or, in this case, in fantasy. I find it hard to believe that Mr. Blish could find it such a hardship to write about the subject parapsychology. The subject seemed to me to have received loving care in "Let the Finder Beware" and "TSBND." More, more of the same, say I.

Almost too good to be true! To my amazed (to use a forbidden word) joy, I discovered not one but two tale in the April ish that I consider worthy of my all-time anthology. One is discussed above, the other is "Journey to

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Seven." I believe this is the first time that such a searching characterization has been attempted in TWS, and I consider it a very good sign of the progress your magazine is making.

NOW, Mr. MacDonald. You have started—I repeat—started a very good novel. Only you can complete it. It is, then, up to you to do so. If you must publish it as a series, then hokay, get busy. As I said before, more, more, more. . . .

"The Planet of Small Men" had little to offer compared to the other two stories I have mentioned. I don't see why you picked it to rave about. Or were you saving your modesty for TSBND.

The Bradbury tale was better than readable, as usual. And as usual, left me with the compulsion to do some deep thinking, but no hint of what to think about.

If Cartmill doesn't have another "Deadline," "The Link" or "With Flaming Swords" lying around your office somewhere, I'll continue to enjoy the Space Salvage series.

About the only thing I can think of to say about "Nocturne" is, I enjoy listening to classical music (as a matter of fact, I'm listening to some good Rimsky-Korsakov as I write this. What better mood music than Scheherazade?) and genuinely regret that I can not hear the symphony-the orchestral astronomer conducted. Er—wasn't the logic a little weak in this tale? It seemed so to me.

The other two; TTC and TBT, did not belong in your magazine.

Take a bow, Ed. That was a well cogitated, piercing editorial.

Let's see now, we've had the soup, the meat . . . now to the nuts. The Reader Speaks . . . I vote—

1. For trimmed edges. You are producing a magazine now which is worthy of binding. Do you know what a mess untrimmed edges make of a binding job?

2. Against such tripe as that put out by R. R. Smith. Even if (And why should we take his word for it?) the "temperature of space," whatever that is, is high enough to melt steel, consider—atoms or molecules in that space are rather rare. Even if the temperature of each one was in the millions, the amount of entropy emparted to a body the size of a human corpse by one of these particles would be radiated off before the next one arrived. And surely Mr. Smith won't have us believe that the texture of space itself has a measurable temperature. If he has a method of measuring it, I am sure that either Mr. Oppenheimer or Mr. Einstein will be very glad to hear of it.

3. AGAINST Brother Farnham, who requests the return of Sarge Saturn. I can think of nothing which would alienate me from your mag faster.

4. For Brother Hammond. That vignette was good.

5. Against both Carter and Zimmer—oops, Bradley—at least this once. Mr. Carter displays a good vocabulary, a seemingly good knowledge of the laws of punctuation and grammar, and other evidences of a good intellect and an alert imagination. Then on what does he base his feeling of inferiority to the ladies? And if no inferiority complex, why his rabid attacks on the quality and amount of material produced by them? An overly successful big sister, perhaps? As for who Cleve Cartmill is, so far as I know, the best answer would be, Cleve Cartmill. To me, however, he's the fellow who wrote the stories listed above, to be found in, respectively, THE BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION, ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE, and A TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION. It's amusing to me how so many fen learn all these various pseudonyms of the various authors and dearly love to parade that knowledge in the pages of the Reader Speaks.

Now for Zimmer. Just where does she get off, telling me and all the other fen what we like in stfiction. For myself, I agree wholeheartedly with the editor's statement that my (as the average fan) interest lies predominantly in the field of psychological conflict. What one of the old Captain Future yarns (as an example of space-opera) could compare with any one of the Baldie series?

As far as outlawing all deep-space stories goes, who says that if a story has a special locale it must needs be a space opera? To refute this, witness Leinster's "First Contact." Here is a tale having for its setting about the deepest interstellar space imaginable, yet is entirely of the psychological conflict variety.

In short, Mr. Who-ever-you-are Editor, you have shown and are showing remarkably laudable judgment and viewpoint.

Just one final comment. Mr. Ward, sit in some day with a class of, say, juniors at USC in a course on advanced symphonic technique (I don't know whether such a course actually exists, but find one on that order). After that, there'll be no more rash statements from you as to whether or not music is intellectual.—305 N. 2nd St., Buckroe Beach, Va.

All we know is what Jim Blish told us of his inner feelings on para-you-know-what. You certainly are a rough man on our "speaking" readers. You and your old Rimsky!

TRASH?
by Helen Soucy

Dear Editor: THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS—that's science fiction? That's TRASH! So now the authors have run so desperately short of ideas they have to dig up junk from the Dark Ages, do they? For centuries we've been trying to destroy the dirty superstition that has hindered and blocked every step of our early progress—superstition, the remnants of which even today cling shamefully to us.

And now this—this Blish character digs up one of the most revolting stories man's cowardice ever invented as an excuse to slay some of his fellow-men and viciously and deliberately tries to insinuate that there is scientific truth in it! If science, as reflected in science fiction, has so degenerated that it allows to pass unchallenged his crude blatant distortions of a few basic facts into a hideous pattern of lies, then we need no longer fear annihilation by the atomic bomb. We should welcome it, rather, as a quicker much easier death than slow torturing destruction by ignorance. His support of such ancient ignorance is a very mockery of science fiction.

In another science fiction magazine I read, in the letter section, a good deal of comment on author Ray Bradbury—about 99.999% of it favorable. In the same issue of the magazine was a story by him. After reading it I decided that maybe these fans had something after all. Then, in TWS, I read his CARNIVAL OF MADNESS—whatever do you do, attract poor stories? Poor? I mean terrible!

NOCTURNE—what a lot of space you filled with nothing. THE TIME CAVE—phooey, just junk! THE BORGHESE TRANSPARENCY—agh! That one stank in the distant galaxies.

But hold on—what's this? LITTLE JOE—why that one was good. Wha' happen. Run out of bad ones?

And PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN—plot wasn't bad and the writing made the story worth while. But—Leinster manages by tone and subtle suggestion to indicate that the small men are not helpless against the invader—then makes his hero continuously protest that they are. Too much discord there.

JOURNEY FOR SEVEN—starts out swell. But the last five pages—ugh!

Most of the letters were interesting—but what a load of them! What do you do—print every one you get? Some of them say your mag's getting better each issue. Looking back over my comments, all I can say is—if that's so, am I glad I didn't read the back issues!

I admit I've been fiendishly cruel to you in this letter, so let me close with this soothing comment—there must have been something about the mag I liked (lend me a magnifying glass and I'll try to discover what) or I wouldn't have bothered writing. And it's improving, they say. Well, here's hoping.—106 Forest Avenue, Port Colborne, Ont.

While we are well aware that playing upon people's names is one of the lowest forms of sport, Miss sans Soucy, about all you've left us to do is to go out and get souced. Happy space opera to you too.

EAU DE GARLIC
by Charles A. Drummond

Dear Editor: Seems to me James Blish had better re-read THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS, then check up on European superstitions re lycanthropy. First time I ever heard that garlic or the garlic family will stop a werewolf from entering a door or window containing the stuff. I think Blish is mixed up with bats—vampire bats! Incidentally the Malays and other Asiatics have similar legends or beliefs, only theirs concern the tiger. North American Indians believed in shape-changing too.—Los Angeles, California.

Sure, and Scandinavians had were-bears, aboriginal South American were-jaguars and so on. Actually lycanthropy, used in its general sense, is said by the Britannica to survive even today and to show itself in modern England in occasional outbursts of cattle-slaughtering. It is far more than superstition, being a definite and deep-seated pathological taint.

Garlic *was* used as Mr. Blish suggests in his story, as an anti-werewolf precaution. It was generally considered the cure-all

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herb of ancient and mediaeval times and as such became almost as much as the cross (though in a far earthier way) the symbol of good. Hence its application to ward off such evils as werewolves. It might have worked at that, for verily garlic is potent stuff.

HA, HA, HA!
by Tom Covington

Dear Editor: I am inspired. Inspired to write my first letter to Thrilling Wonder Stories.

My inspiration came just after I had finished reading the April issue and was contemplating the stories "There Shall Be No Darkness" by James Blish and "Journey for Seven" by J. D. MacDonald (I wonder why). Anyway, I've been nursing this inspiration for three weeks now—trying not to succumb to it. But, at last, after my brilliant stand, the forces of evil have won. I have decided to grace the pages of your mag. (one of them at least) with a letter which will make all the people who have been thinking all along that your mag. is trash decide once and for all that it is and, with a few well chosen, but ill-spoken words, give it a nice firm heave into the garbage dump (my fingers want to put it where it belongs in this parentheses, but I won't do it).

Ya ha ha ha ha, at last I've found a mistake in a story. It's about time. I've listened many times to other fans point out perfectly obvious errors which I missed. Now, finally, I've caught an error. It's in the info. which Mr. Blish gives about the Browning Automatic Rifle on page 89, col. 2. Can any of you other fans find it?

I too, think that John D. MacDonald is a much better writer than is shown by fan-letters. His "Journey For Seven" is swell.

I rate the other stories in this issue in the following order:

(1) "The Time Cave"—Walt Sheldon—short but sweet.

(2) "The Borghese Transparency," Carter Sprague.

(3) "Little Joe." Oh, no! Enough of a good thing is enough. I'm getting pretty tired of these space salvage stories. Why in the dickens doesn't Cartmill write something else like "Bells On His Toes"? Now that was really a good story. It combined lots of humor with a novel idea.

(4) "Planet of Small Men." Good, but not up to Leinster's usual form. He was my favorite author, but now I've changed to Rog Phillips.

(5) "Carnival of Madness." I like Bradbury's stories a lot. But this time he's a little off.

Lawrence's illos. for this issue were fine and Finlay's superb. But those other artists' (?) illos. Gaaaaaaaaaa!—315 Dawson Street, Wilmington, North Carolina.

Well, we're glad you found *something* to love, Cove. As for the Browning Automatic Rifle flub, may we present—

TRAPPED?
by Joseph McSpreitt

Dear Sir: I believe the trouble with James Blish and editors and copy readers is that they have never seen or heard anything about the Browning Automatic Rifle. In the first place the gun doesn't use .44 caliber cartridges but .30 caliber. In the second place the fire control stud has three positions—marked S for slow, F for fast and AF for automatic fire or "awful fast." In none of these positions does it fire the whole magazine (not clip) with one pull of the trigger (unless you hold the trigger down). In the third place it is semi-automatic, which means you do not have to reload unless you have a defective shell. When your magazine is empty you release it, put a full one in and pull the trigger. In the fourth place Mr. Browning was very proud of his recoil mechanism. It had only one flaw—instead of giving a kick back it had a tendency to pull the rifle forward and upward. Before the bipod was employed it was fired in the kneeling position from the shoulder, with one end of the sling attached to the front of the rifle and the other end under the left foot, to keep the muzzle down. In the fifth place, as the magazine only holds fifteen rounds, you couldn't very well use it like a hose.

The rest of the magazine is pretty good—both for April and previous issues of both TWS and SS.

Because you answer that Covington cove so completely, Joseph, we are running your letter even though you omitted to put your address on it—a practise we do not generally subscribe to. Thanks for giving us the correct data.

KOWLOON PIDGIN
by Gordon P. Eggers

Dear Sir: Just a few lines of appreciation for your magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES. It is a great tonic to read books like this as usually the only American magazines we get are either cowboy or detective—and while these latter are all right they do get boring after awhile. Incidentally, on looking at the date of the magazine, it was August, 1944. We are slightly behind the times. Anyway, keep sending them this way—we shall always appreciate them.

Also I wonder if you could find me a pen-friend of the female variety. Life here is so dull that I would appreciate any young lady who could help me relieve the boredom. I am five feet eight, weigh about 150 pounds with passable face. Am working on radar for the Air Ministry Experimental Station. I have been overseas 32 months in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and now in the New Territories. We do not get into town very often, so have to rely on ourselves for amusement. Oh yes, I forgot, my age is 21 and I am Irish with fair hair. Thanks a million and congratulations on your magazines.—630, AC, 21022 A.M.E.S., c/o R.A.F., Kai Tak, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

We hope the printing of this missive brings response from some of our brash and beautiful femme readers, even though this is hardly a pen-pal column.

You certainly are a bit behind the times out Kai Tak way, Gordon. Looking back over our files we find that there were Summer and Fall issues of TWS and we can't figure out which one you saw. So, for our other readers, let's take a look at the contents of both (courtesy of R. C. Peterson and his incredible Speer Decimal Classification) and see what was doing at that time.

For Summer, 1944, we led off with THE GIANT RUNT by Ross Rocklynne, a short novel. Sole novelet was PRIESTESS OF PAIMARI by Albert de Pina. Short stories included HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE by Frank Ferry, TERROR IN THE DUST by Paul S. Powers, HELICOPTER INVASION by Ford Smith, THE DEVOURING TIDE by Polton Cross and GOD OF LIGHT by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach.

The Fall issue that followed was opened by THE ETERNAL NOW, a short and memorable Murray Leinster effort. Two novelets were featured, THE LAST MAN IN NEW YORK by Paul McNamara, and BEYOND THE VORTEX by Frank Belknap Long. The four shorts were THE BLOATED BRAIN by Alfred G. Kuehn, MONGROVIAN CARAVAN by Richard Tooker, THE GADGET GIRL by Ray Cummings and THE ULTIMATE ANALYSIS by John Russell Fearn.

Somewhat to our horror we find ourselves remembering clearly only the Leinster and McNamara stories, although we know we read THE GIANT RUNT and PRIESTESS OF PAIMARI and MONGROVIAN CARAVAN. Time can be a dirty dealer—or perhaps in this instance a merciful one.

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OH FAITHLESS ONE!
by Vernon L. McCain

Dear Lemuel Mutton, as I presume you wish to be called: I would like to ask a question. When can we accept the editor's word and when can we not? In answer to Shelby Vick's letter re the identity of Cleve Cartmill you reply that "Cleve Cartmill is Cleve Cartmill."

Back during those dark war days of science fiction famine at the newsstands, as a fairly new reader, I thirsted after more of the stuff. So I cased all the second-hand stores in town. The harvest was light but I did manage to come up with a 1942 issue of (censored) and an old Cap Future mag. I think this was about the second issue after Hamilton was drafted.

In the letter column there were many inquiries about the identity of Brett Sterling and in almost identical language the answer was that Brett Sterling was Brett Sterling and nobody else. And this is the name you now admit to be a house pen-name. Of course, I realize you weren't the editor then but that brings up the question, can a man be honest and still be an editor? (All right, Mutton, put down the blue pencil.)

What brings this up? You stole one of my ideas, that's all! Of course, I'll admit you probably got the idea first but that doesn't make the offense any less heinous.

A couple of days ago I was strolling down the street considering the differences and similarities of science-fiction and fantasy. Suddenly it occurred to me that they occupied almost exactly the same relationship to each other as detective and mystery fiction. I immediately started planning to point out in a clear, concise and cultured manner (all right, I can dream, can't I?) the analogy.

From the corner of my eye I spied a middle-aged, respectable looking man with a pulp magazine inconspicuously tucked under his arm. Looking closer, I ascertained it was an unfamiliar looking copy of TWS. Rushing to my favorite newsstand I snapped up the new copy and, as usual, turned first to The Reader Speaks. And there I find you beat me to my analogy! Lemmy, Lemmy, Lemmy, how could you? You must have used both a time-warp and a mental probe to produce that kind of villainy. But I'll forgive you as the April issue was well above average.

As I expected MacDonald had the best story in the issue. Much lip-smacking over this one. I personally rate Nocturne very close to Journey for Seven. However, this is more or less specialized and I suspect your non-musical readers found it extremely boring. I know I've been affected that way by these specialized stories in fields with which I am unfamiliar.

While Blish's lycanthrope tale was well done it hardly seemed to belong in your pages. More of a detective story. Anyway, I doubt if there will ever be another tale of this type which can approach Boucher's "The Compleat Werewolf." Bradbury's short would have been fine, had I not just completed a very similar tale by him a couple of days earlier in another magazine. If he is going to write such similar stories, why doesn't he hold them up for six months?

I see La Zimmer went and got herself hitched. Well, this leaves a vacancy in your pages. For some time her letters have been supplying that feminine touch to your pages that the other femme fans seem to lack. While well-written and well-thought-out, every word was obviously from a feminine viewpoint. This kept all your bachelor correspondents (and maybe some of the married ones, too) on their toes. Did you ever notice that the most stimulating discussions occur when you get about six men and a woman together? The latter sort of acts as a catalyst.

I'm afraid Astra as an old married woman won't pack quite the same magic. Not that any self-respecting STF fan would be caught dead married to a gal with that much mentality. They'll inevitably pick some wide-eyed little mental deficient who can fall in love with their big, beautiful brains. Rather disillusioning to have to live with someone like Miss Z., I'm afraid. However, we need someone like that around and Mrs. Bradley doesn't carry quite the glamorous twang as did the sound of "Astra" Zimmer. So all you young eligible femme fen step up and apply for the job. Auditions going on constantly.

By the way, much as I adore her style, I disagree violently with the above lady. Somewhere she seems to have picked up the peculiar idea that space opera is the only true science fiction. What she doesn't seem to realize is that space opera bears exactly the same relationship to other STF tales as the pulp detective and Western stories do to the slick magazines, the serious novels, and other fiction of the type.

What STF does is just add the ingredients of imagination and futuristic gadgets to these basic plot ideas. Even the most original development of STF, the recent interest in mentalities and reactions of the future is merely another variation on the best-selling theme exploited by the soul-searching novelists such as Marquand. If Mrs. Bradley prefers her Western "they went that-aways" to the more adult literature, O.K. However, let's not try and say that any one branch of STF bears exclusive title to the name.

Guess this is long enough, so I will quit, which is probably the most entertaining thing I have said in this letter.—c/o Western Union, Ellensburg, Washington.

We wouldn't say that, Vernon, really we wouldn't. Methinks we shall let Astra Zimmer Bradley answer for herself. That "old" adjective should straighten out her Toni nicely in a vertical direction.

You want to know whether an editor can be honest. The answer, of course, is NO in the strict sense of the word. Our job is to put together and help sell magazines and in the latter capacity we are at times of necessity as devious as any other salesman up to and including Willy Loman of DEATH OF A ——— fame.

As for Brett Sterling, well, we broke down and told all some time ago. But I can assure you that Cleve Cartmill is neither alias, nom de plume, pseudonym nor nom de guerre. That is the lad's name, bless him.

Sorry we lifted your idea on parallels between stf and mystery fiction. Those things, however, happen. We once wrote a story ourselves and, shortly after it appeared, received a humorously irate epistle from Bill Temple, over in England, claiming we had completely robbed him of a potential story sale. He pointed out an historical error (very minor indeed) in our story and managed to pull an even bigger skull in his letter—which we were delighted to point out to him. Since his error was in English history, we, as an American, relished it even more.

Worst case of this sort of thing we ever heard happened to Brian Hooker, author and librettist for such famed operettas as THE VAGABOND KING. An ardent Yale alumnus, he wrote a brand new set of Yale lyrics to the hit tune of that show, the TO HELL WITH BURGUNDY number, took it with him in his pocket to a Yale-Army game with the intention of presenting it to the University at a banquet afterward.

All that happened was that Army, with their own set of lyrics, sang it at him from across the field. Hooker never even took his own version out of his pocket and crept back to New York with his tail between his legs. It seems his collaborator—Rudolph Friml, we believe—had already given the music to West Point without knowing Hooker's intentions. 'Twas a dark moment for Brian.

JUST AN OLD LAMB CHOP
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Editor Mutton (Lemuel, that is): I know you! You're just a lamb in mutton's clothing! There hasn't been such a riot since somebody discovered that the editor of one of your competitors has a name that spells PULP. However, that isn't the purpose of this screed. . . .

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Dracula, depart! Matholch, move over! Die, Undying Monster, for Author Blish has dish-covered what makes a werewolf tick! O would I were a werewolf! Endicrinology's the coming *stuff and a simple glandularimbalance is the riddle of the ages!* I might have guessed. Seriously, it's the best werewolf story in Lo, many a long year. It still doesn't beat my favorite DRACULA (and anybody who says DRACULA is hard to read should repose permanently in a werewolf's belly) but it is a really swell yarn. More, more, more! Blish lost his reputation with LET THE FINDER BEWARE but he now has it back with this latest. Excellent, excellent! Even better than mutton! (X this out too if you want to, but I know you, natch, Mr. M.)

NOCTURNE also is an excellent yarn and touched a responsive note in me, since I also once cherished the hope of being a singer. That dream vanished these many years ago, but Sheila's plight still touches me . . . and if I were she I also would have knocked Brian out; since I will bowl anyone who calls me a "lyric soprano" over. I have a mezzo-soprano, once soprano and dipping inexorably toward the contralto range . . . probably by the time I'm thirty I'll be singing bass!

Oh Lord, let's not get into a controversy over all those *little science fillers. I don't like 'em, I don't read 'em, but* let's not have another big blow-up in the READER SPEAKS over whether or no to have 'em. That's your business, editor, but when I see you printing them, I groan, because now all the fans will start to yap . . . yap . . . yap!

CARNIVAL OF MADNESS was L-O-U-S-Y!!!!! Is this the guy who wrote AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT? Oh, no, no, no, no, a thousand times no!

About TIME CAVE, I can think of only one thing to say: I'll bet you had a couple of pages to fill up and nothing else *to put in them.*

SPACE SALVAGE goes on and on . . . and on (and very nicely, too!).

As for *the eternal controversy anent no-women-have-ever-equalled-the-men-in-the-literary-field,* I'm going to be a traitor to my sex and say I agree with Lin Carter. We don't have any lady Shakespeares in our midst, and the only thing that Sappho of Lesbos contributed was to add a slightly naughty word to the modern psychological vocabulary. But I'll bet that C. L. Moore outlasts her equally famous husband; *and that people will still be reading the Brontes when Emerson's essays are crumbling to dust.*

Women usually write more spectacularly and to a more *limited audience than men; witness the success of such novels* as GONE WITH THE WIND, FOREVER AMBER and so on; also, women usually live for the moment, and their books are apt to have a great deal of success at the time, but not to last. Which is all to the good. Who wouldn't rather be famous while he or she was alive, than be remembered ages after he or she was dead? Women don't have to achieve *immortality in literature; they can achieve immortality either* in childbearing . . . or by acting as inspiration for some man. Helen of Troy never wrote anything . . . but probably *if it hadn't been for Helen, the Iliad, the Odyssey and the* Aeneid would never have got written. George Sand's books are almost forgotten now . . . but Chopin's music, for which she was mostly responsible, is very famous.

And women also write the worst books . . . such nonsense as THE SHEIK, or some of Elinor Glyn's twaddle. No, although I hope for a literary career myself, I admit that most men write more lastingly than most women. (I can say nothing better, anyhow!)

Having nothing better to say at the moment, I shall sign off; *I've got a date with the fourth chapter of a novelet.* See you in Tibet.—309 A Ninth Street, Levelland, Texas.

All in all, a singularly noncontroversial letter, coming from you, Marion. And after what McCain just said about you in the wedded state. If you really have the let's-be-an-inspiration bug, we'd appreciate a few succinct words from your husband on the subject. Somehow we have always had our doubts as to what anyone ever really did to help a mate toward artistic achievement—man and woman included. Some authorities seem to think George Sand did more harm than good to Chopin.

As a rule inspiration cannot be deliberately built. You yourself must be aware of the lamentable lack of control anyone has over his own subjective mind, much less over that of anyone else. The supreme arrogance of anyone who considers him or herself able to make any creative person create, rivals that of certain men of the cloth who, after graduating from theological seminary, consider themselves divinely appointed to tell other human beings how to behave.

And, of course, there is always the classic example of Mrs. Babe Ruth, who is supposed to have once said, when the year 1927 came up in conversation, "Oh, yes, that was the year *we* hit sixty."

Sure, you gals can have the children (can you bear it!) but where other creative work is concerned we fear you're as much on your own as we are—which is eminently the way things should be.

STATIC?
by Marvin Goldenberg

Dear Ed.: Science fiction is coming into a new day, my friends. On the radio, on television, in the publishing houses, in the book and literary sections of the great daily newspapers all over the country, it is receiving new and critical attention from the heretofore static minds. Since I and thousands of other readers and fans consider TWS as one of the leading exponents of the s-f field, you naturally are receiving more attention from everyone that can read.

However, my dear ed, I must comment on the recent type of story you have been running. It seems that emphasis has been placed on gadgetry of late rather than characterization. The human mind is quite a wonderful gadget itself and finds no difficulty in following any plausible lead whether into the interstellar spaces or the ramifications of supra-dimensional time.

But once it settles down at the indicated theater of action it craves a certain pattern of action involving conflict—of ideas or personalities—and some kind of plausible resolution. It also seeks identification with the personalities who carry the story. If a story has those elements it will be as appealing on Main Street as on Mars. It seems, therefore, that what makes any fiction good is not its apparatus but the humanity of its characters, the force of its ideas and beauty of its writing.

Don't get me wrong, though, for I'm sure that many of us *enjoy a good gadget story once in awhile. I myself lean* toward the space action tale, a la Leinster, Hamilton, et al.

In your April ish, f'rinstance, I would rate Bradbury's "Carnival of Madness" as the top story—a plot combining ultra-scientific gadgetry with Poe-ish characters. Because of very fine characterizations Blish's "There Shall Be No Darkness" would rate a close second—and it certainly is based on an ancient werewolf theme. Only because Murray Leinster is a master of the machine type of story would his "Planet of the Small Men" rate third. The other tales, I am sorry to say, were phew.—713 Gentry Pl., Columbia, Mo.

We'd rather you called them a select phew, Marvin, but otherwise and in general we agree with your expressed sentiments.

NOTHING BUT COMPLIMENTS
by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Pals: Your April issue I have just finished and believe me I have nothing but compliments for the entire mag. What I liked best, I think, is that your publication contains a true variety of stories.

For instance this issue ranges from space pirates to hypnosis to various aspects of atomic discovery to lycanthropy. Such a wide scope of subject matter can have only one result—the reader is ever freshly interested and never knows the boredom generated by certain other magazines which employ a hide-bound editorial policy in one field or another—in which the reader, through no fault of his own, tires of the sameness of theme.

So believe me when I repeat with honest enthusiasm and admiring eagerness that you print a mag that is doubly interesting and doubly satisfying to such old-time stf fans as I. In addition your artists do fine work and I simply love the one on page 13 for the SMALL MEN story. Whoops!—8519 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland 5, California.

Well, we have always tried to be catholic

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in our selection of stories. If we like them we don't care whether they are "heavy" science, satiric, emotional, space opera or downright slapstick. This seems to annoy some of our more specialized pen-pals but we have a hunch a lot more folk would be annoyed if we attempted to put rigid limits on the sort of story we publish. We like it? It's in. That's the sole requirement.

SLIGHTLY OVER-BUSTED
by Leslie Waddell Vale

Dear Editor: Don't look now but I think you are getting slightly over-busted on the TWS side. Of the last three issues of TWS and SS, those of the former publication rated much higher in interest, story content and plausibility. I don't know how your backlog of stories is arranged but I think it would be a good idea to check back and spread the bigger names more evenly between TWS and its kid brother.

One story I must comment on—the Wallace West yarn in April TWS. I am a softy when it comes to anything that refers to or quotes the Gaelic. So I read and wept my way through NOCTURNE until I came to what was meant to be the climax. Magically I was chilled and dehydrated. I grant that it fitted the story. I grant that it was logical. But so many stories in the past three years have rung in this Home Sweet Home theme that my tear ducts were wrung dry. The story itself was well written—in fact smacked a little of Bradbury but not much.

By the way, have you read Ray's FOREVER AND THE EARTH in another magazine? This I rate as his only flopperoo despite one or two fan letters of praise. He is so prolific however that his batting average remains in the high .900's.

I've been reading stf since the days of Gernsback and definitely enjoyed every copy. This pretty well dates me, I suppose, but I remember with joy RALPH 124C41. Remember?

Anent the present argument anent the survival of the ego after death—

Credo: Soles occidere et redire possunt
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
Nox est una perpetua dormienda.
—825 South Main Street, Los Angeles 14, Cal.

Darn it, despite some seven years of school and college Latin, the only line we can read of that one is the last, which seems to go—"Night is an everlasting sleep." Maybe we shouldn't have wound up taking our translation book into class with us. How about some help on the first two lines, fellows?

To continue replying to your letter in reverse, we read the Bradbury story in question and it is one of the few tales by this author which we did not purchase in a rush. As for your Gaelic tear ducts, Leslie, we'll try to give you a good cry from time to time. How soap is your operatic taste anyway?

We can't find that RALPH XXXX thing in our files—wish we'd read it if it's as good as all that. As for the alleged imbalance in story quality between TWS and SS, we don't believe it. Of course SS must stand or fall largely on the quality of its long novel. But the other stories are pretty evenly divvied up.

LISTEN, SIR OLIVER!
by Bob Farnham

Dear Editor: I see you have a character by the name of J. T. Oliver who favors abolishing the letters in TRS in favor of another story. Curses be upon his heartless soul! Fan letters are the heart and soul of our two magazines, "Thrilling Wonder" and "Startling," and he, the soulless demon, would do away with them! For shame, Sir Oliver!

The April issue was even better than the last one, except, as is usual, the cover pic. A whopping big hole in the ship, smack in the middle of deep space, and neither the Bim nor the Bum have a space-suit on! Ain't they seppozed t' breathe?

"The Planet of the Small Men" and "There Shall Be No Darkness" tied for first place with "Carnival of Madness." TWO Fantasies in an STF magazine! The stories were dandy, but Startling and Thrilling cannot claim to be STF mags when you use Fantasy, and the name of the new mag, "Fantastic Stories Quarterly"! UGH!! With all the goldinged fantasy mags on the market, you pick that name! We used to get STF in our beloved mags but it is rapidly turning out to be Fantasy, which means that soon we will not have an STF mag any more. BAWWWWW. . . .

I like fantasy. The stories in the April issue were Tops, and the whole magazine rated likewise, but gee whizl—why claim to be an STF publication when over 50% of the contents are Fantasy?

Those mysterious results from the Vortex out West are duplicated where I work. When my Boss gets mad he lets loose a verbal blast that equals the Vortex for giving you that dizzy feeling. Pray tell me, Ed, wot in Blue Blazes is, or are, Centripeians? Seems to be a reference to being "Ripe"—meaning we smell? Hmmmm . . . food for thought, there!

Now for a first attempt at a limerick (and the last), in a personal to a certain Fem-Fan.

Life must be dull for that Poor Gal
Who says she don't like Bergey.
'Tis the saddest tale I e'er heard tell!
To learn the worth of Truest Art,
Go study some, I urge Ye!

All in all, the April issue was even better than the one before!—1139 East 44th Street, Chicago 15, Ill.

Thanks, Bob, for coming so nobly to our defense and breaking a lance over Oliver's pate. As for the stf-fantasy business, we simply aren't going to be drawn in again—not just now anyway. This one is getting as stale as the Merritt-Kuttner or pro-and-con-Lovecraft controversies of unsainted memory.

Now what in hades do you mean by calling that quintuplet of yours a limerick? The beat is all wrong. A true limerick goes like this—

A bottle-scarred veteran named Farnham
Misconstrued our aspersion, gosh darn him!
By Centripeian, well—
We referred not to smell
But to Arlesian tripe, which should larn him.

Now do you get the idea, Bob?

MATH-MAD
by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: Your editorial was very interesting. I suppose you are right. Systems for the masses will never work. But you neglected to mention a system for the individual. Einstein recently proved that the whole universe consists of electromagnetic force. Hokay, in a few years, man might realize that his own grey cells and his own thinking are nothing more than an operation of the same electromagnetic force. What then?

Well, when that happens, man's mind will be reduced to mere formulae. This will shock a great many individuals. And it will help a great many more people. For awhile, I played around with the idea that for every action in the conscious mind, there was an equal reaction in the subconscious mind. I even had mathematical terms to explain dreams, schizophrenia and every other mental function. The ultimate of mathematical expressions for the human mind would be something to explain paranormal capacities.

But then, the human mind hasn't got enough energy to make use of the knowledge, even if it had it. Without psychophysical capacities you can still get bumped off in a

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million accidental ways. So I agree with your last sentence on page 9. There might be a secret of life, a mathematical secret, but the human mind isn't strong enough for it. Not now.

PLANET OF THE SMALL MEN by Leinster is typical of Leinster. So the guy can turn out a tremendous wordage? So what? The plots might be good but the characters are dummies with names and there aren't any emotions in the writing. One gets the idea Leinster is a builder of buildings and he knows how to build them but he doesn't give a darn about the building.

THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS is the best Blish story I've ever read. Blish is really improving. NOCTURNE'S plot was lousy, Ray's CARNIVAL OF MADNESS is a cross-breed between his THE EXILES and the MARIONETTES, INC. stories. I wonder if anyone has noticed that ninety per cent of his stories can be traced: The writing of one evidently gives him the idea for another and that the idea for another and so on.

For instance, THE OFF SEASON was obviously a remake of THE MILLION YEAR PICNIC idea. And the idea behind the Marionette, Inc. stories is identical but the plot switched several times. Then, there is his MARS IS HEAVEN! printed in a competitor of yours. The idea behind that story is identical to the idea behind THE VISITOR and THE EARTH MEN. Wish I could get a system like that and then write that good!

TRS: The letters are getting to be intelligent. Where are the screwballs? Where is Chad Oliver? Hmmmm?

Thanks for your comment hoping that this year sees some of my stories in print. This year might do it. My collection of letters from you shows you've rejected eleven of my stories. Confidentially, I don't blame you for rejecting either one. Frank, ain't I?

Say, when are you going to print another Kuttner novel? Something like THE TIME AXIS?—6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Delaware.

The formula idea doesn't shock us especially. As long as we're stuck with what in some quarters laughingly passes for a mind we might as well go along with it whatever the label. But we seriously doubt the range of present-day mathematics, to say nothing of present-day minds, to reduce life, thinking processes and the like to any such simple equation. Or even a complicated one for that matter.

You bring up a point in your Bradbury column that we meant to answer earlier in this column. Ray does dig into one vein and mine it right through to the finish. It is a very handy talent for an author to possess—also a rare one. As to simultaneous appearance of stories in the same Bradbury vein in several magazines at once—well, since that's the way he works it can hardly be helped. We have held some of his short stories as much as a year or more before getting opportunity to publish them.

Where *is* Chad Oliver? Texas, probably. Here's hoping again you begin to hit with your stories this year, Dick.

UNDER THE WIRE
by Lin Carter

Cheerio: A little late this time, but I hope this gets in under the line. Murray Leinster, long an old standby in stfiction, came up with his usual type yarn again. "Planet of Small Men" was not particularly outstanding or especially remarkable, nor was it—on the other hand—dull or hackneyed. A usual, interesting, well-written and moderately unimportant novelet. I have a vague impression that this was extremely like another not unrecent novel, but half-hearted research fails to uncover a title. Rather good, though.

James Blish on the other hand turned out an intriguing and entertaining piece. Blish is definitely an author worth cultivation and has a style that is eminently readable. Though out of place in a science-fiction publication of this type it was still worth printing. Finlay pix were really outstanding.

Of the others only "Journey for Seven" was in the least outstanding. MacDonald is capable of high-quality work and only too infrequently turns it out. This was a remarkable story—most interesting feature being the detailed description of a superman's feelings, emotions and reactions. Bradbury is in again, I see, with another not unreadable variation on a theme of his. Ever notice how Brad will write a certain type of yarn, then write a good half dozen variations on the thing? One of his few poor writing habits—he is somewhat too prolific.

Now as for our controversy on Women vs. Literature. Again you list an imposing list of female writers but need I point out that only one or two are writers of the first water? The others are second and third rate authoresses, and some comparatively unknown. I notice one Bill Venable remarks "Lin Carter is right. Women's place in the home."

Now hold it, folks! I said or implied nothing of the sort! I'm no misogynist or women-hater in any sense. And I do not say women's place is in the home. I don't really know where it is—but I do know that it is not, or at least up to now has not been, in Literature.

You mention an extremely apt fact—that up to the few last decades women have not been allowed the intellectual, sexual, political and social freedom that fosters the arts. A very good point, one I completely overlooked and agree with. But my point is this—regardless of the reasons (and they are legion), no matter whose fault it is, the fact still remains completely obvious and completely indisputable, that women simply have not produced any sizable amount of the world's classic literature. I don't know why, and care less. The fact remains.

Look at the comparatively minute field of science-fantasy. How many women-writers can you name off-hand? Besides an occasional Brackett or Moore or St. Clair or Mayne Hull there are mighty few. And a Brackett is not a Van Vogt, a St. Clair is not a Heinlein nor a Moore a Skylark Smith. Why? Don't ask me. But it's true.

Anybody else care to air their views on this mildly fascinating controversy? Astra Zimmer-Bradley? Rickey Slavin? Any takers? Lets put some life into the TRS, with some stimulating discussion!

To momentarily change the subject, albeit interesting, your lineup for the June issue looks promising. R. F. Jones has a touch of the kind of verbal magic I like. Incidentally, I'm still waiting to hear from La Brackett anent that quotation from the Sanskrit "Black Marigolds" and her novelet title. If anyone in the audience can get in contact I'm really interested in learning yea or nay and would greatly appreciate somebody telling her about it.

Till nextime, Mr. "Mutton." Good luck with the new reprint zines and that goes for our old standbys as well.—1734 Newark St. So., St. Petersburg, Fla.

We've said our small say on the place of women in literature—and we still have to find a male capable of producing Willa Cather's DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP. Nor do we think the girls have been at it long enough for passing of judgment. Not en masse and loaded with impersonal male responsibilities, that is. Selah!

Here's hoping the June issue lived up to your mildly fervent expectations.

FUMES FROM A FRESHMAN
by Tom McNeil

Dear Editor: As a fairly recent (since last fall) science fiction fan and a freshman at DE PAUW University (Chem. major), I have not taken time to berate you for some of the minor foul-ups that have appeared in TWS in the past. Your April issue, however, has shaken me out of my lethargy by its sheer magnificence. (Incidentally, this is not a beef. Relax!)

THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS deserves all of the beneficent adjectives published in the last fifty years. That covers a lot of ground, so we'll take care of the others this way: they were almost as good. All but one. No, this still isn't a beef. Just tell Ray Bradbury to quit writing. Anything after CARNIVAL OF MADNESS would be anti-climactic—he's spoiled his market. Edgar Allan himself couldn't have written it better.

Before long I'm going to quit fighting temptation and write you a story. I've got all the qualifications for an stauthor: a boundless curiosity, a hell of an imagination, an interest and some knowledge in every branch of science extant (plus a few branches that went down with Atlantis). And (mix well together) I've just made a semester A in what is considered one of the toughest English Comp. courses in the country. There are probably some complications, but

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that should be a fair start. (Yeah, I know. You gotta be able to write good stories, too. Aren't you guys ever satisfied?)

One other thing. I'm a budding poet too, so if you ever print a real dud, prepare to be enveloped in a blue-coruscating cloud of iambic pentameter.—Airport Road, Greencastle, Indiana.

Okay, Tom, mighty sweet fumes. Bring on your MSS, your iambics, dactyls, anapests, trochees and all the rest. We can took them. But we are convinced that there is no such thing as a rugged English course for anyone with the active interest in the language a professional writer must have—always excepting our wretched-half-year of Anglo-Saxon. Once again, in that regard, we can only praise Allah for inducing the Norman Conquest of England and relegating the hog-language known as early English to the wallow it belonged in.

MORE MISCONSTRUE
by Shelby Vick

Dear Joshua:
Rejoice! for
you
have won.
I
hereby admit defeat. My style is
ignored!
Misunderstood!
And also deliberately
misconstrued!

(Sob! A persecuted little complex—that's me.) Oh, well. I can't stand it any longer, Josh (to give you a Biblical name, since you seem to have no other) for there is just too much for me to say to get into a rather cramped type of letter. So I'll stop trying to be original and once more join the anonymity of the mob. (Bloop!) And I am swallowed up. Just call me Jonah. . . .

You had quite a variety in the April issue. Several Greats that should rank with the classics. In fact, most of them came under the heading of at least Swell! Altho one was just average. And one was hack. . . .

First, of course, was King Leinster. "Planet of the Small Men" was a really wonderful follow-up of the recent Lost Race story. The action barely paused—yet it didn't tire me—the psychology was sensible and characterization not his best but still above the average. In fact, I have only one minor complaint: He never budged my supreme confidence in the Small-men, thus a bit of the suspense was lost. All in all, however, I was superbly satisfied. (Don't mind the adjectives. I've been reading too many movie reviews.)

The novelets were very good, each in its own way. I find it hard to put one above the other. Crown-Prince MacDonald tapped that well-spring of optimism in human nature—the feeling that most human beings are basically good; and that linked with the belief—no, the hope—that there's a place for everybody (for you, thus for me) and piled on that, the desire to conquer space. MacDonald's good at emotions. . . .

Court Wizard James Blish delved into horror to come up with a scientific story of a werewolf. Which brings me back to science and fantasy. This is one of those damnably good borderline stories—the kind I wish you'd stop running in TWS and SS. Put out another mag, perhaps a quarterly, for fantasy. But I want science (or psuedo-same) when I read "Thrilling" and "Startling," no matter how good the fantasy is.

Much as I liked it, another along the s-f line like the other two novelets would have suited me—and, I think, other s-f fen—much better. As I understand it, those are the ones TWS and Startling are dedicated to. "There Shall Be No Darkness" was good, and there was a lot of science in it, but werewolves are one of the few things that can definitely be dropped under the "fantasy" heading, no matter how 'scientific'ly they're doctored. . . .

"Nocturne." A moment's pause, in reverence. . . . This guy West can handle the emotions too. Like Percy said, "Trite," that ending. But effective. Anthologies should be begging for this one.

Bradbury brought back a theme that he established in a (please excuse my boldness) competitor. And he built it up as thoroughly, as carefully, as beautifully as Stendhal had the House rebuilt. Barely on the other side of fantasy. "For the love of God"? Ah, but no! For the love of Man!

"Little Joe." (Apologies to Cartmill. Thought he was a pen-name because one well-known fan said 'twas Kuttner, another pointed out where Robert Heinlein also had an experience with the FBI about U235, as Cartmill did.) Throughout the series he has built Jake into a living, loving, convincing character, with Carroll as a strong right arm to keep Jake up when the going gets rough. I couldn't say enough for this series—or anything against it. I've got a gripe, but it isn't about the story—it's this: WHY DID ORBAN ILLUSTRATE IT? Surely you know you should always keep the same artist on a series? Orban is darn good, but I'm used to Astarita, and was satisfied with him. Even though he did botch the Cap Future illos in SS.

The old one was the one about the old thing that wasn't really old, after all. "The Time Cave," by that knave, Sheldon. I suppose the writing was clear enough, but the twist has been twisted to death, since August 6th, 1945.

"The Borghese Transparency" had a hack twist. The plot itself was a fugitive from some detective magazine.

About NEW stories—36 possible situations? Seems it could be pinned down closer than that—to one. A problem. Something (or nothing, as the case may be) is done about it.

Letters: Fine, stimulating. (Nardizzi: It's F-l-o-r-i-d-a, you californianame!) Sorry I can't say more about them, but mine own letter is getting longish.

Art: Finlay's werewolf best. Stevens next with his Planet illos, then Orban (Welcome, friend!) for "Carnival." Napoli, in trying to change his style, has gone from bad to GAHHHHH!

Which means I'm through, for now.—Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida.

You may be persecuted and little, Brother Shelby, but we refuse to admit that you are complex. As for that Cartmill-Orban business, the art department has its troubles too at times—and Astarita wasn't available at the particular time the picture in question was needed. But, by popular recognition, Orban is one of the tops in the field, too, so is everybody happy? They should be.

CUCKOO'S NEST
by H. S. Weatherby, HM1

Dear Editor: It seems ages since I complimented you on TWS but the April issue is so Super Colossal—a movie claim—I couldn't resist writing. I find it difficult to rate the stories of this issue since every yarn is absolutely top-drawer material but, with much chewing of lip, I start my chore.

1. "THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS," by James Blish, has a Class of its own. How strange it is to find a "weird one" in scienti-fiction! Smoothly written, beautifully characterized with authentic atmosphere, it is truly a masterpiece! Blish had me in the palm of his proverbial hand from the start. He's excellent! I sincerely believe he could be the coming master of the macabre.

2. "Carnival of Madness." Bradbury scores again! I expect he'll never be less than second-best in your line up of authors. His short-short was so naturally conceived—well, what would one expect from Ray Bradbury?

3. "Journey for Seven," by John D. MacDonald, was a rapidly paced novelet that had compelling interest. With vastly interesting, brief narration the yarn has colorful characterizations and believable locales, atmosphere, transitions, retrospections—everything to make a superb story.

4. "Planet of the Small Men," by Murray Leinster, might have taken star billing in one of your competitor prozines, but in TWS it had stiff competition. It is an interesting interplanetary action yarn, however, and the "Little" people are fascinating.

5. "The Power of Suggestion," article by Simpson M. Ritter is straight dope. I've seen hypnotism with my duties as a Neuro Psychiatric Technologist, until two years ago, and can state that Ritter knows what he is talking about. He deserves a curtain call.

6. "Nocturne," by Wallace West, started with an "Off to Buffalo," but petered out toward the climax. I think he can do better.

7. "The Borghese Transparency," by Carter Sprague, is another excellent weirdie.

8. "Little Joe," by Cleve Cartmill, is average scienti-fiction, but written with inspiration.

9. "The Time Cave," by Walt Sheldon, had a nice idea. We also think he can write.

Now, The Reader Speaks: I shuffled through three boresome postals including Eve S. Firestone's, NFFF Hostess, when Lo and Behold!—there arrived an intelligent epistle by Joe Gibson. We need more letters like Joe's; and also hope that Richard R. Smith—from Wilmington, Delaware—lands his material in the prozines.

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While writing of lady scribes, Lin Carter, you made no mention of Mae West who is the author of "The Constant Sinner." She's muh fav'rite! She's also the playwright, and star, of the stage smash-hit: "Diamond Lil."

In closing, I leave you with a bit of verse. Please don't "chock" it in the basket.

Between editorials for our "Shivers,"
"Thrilling Wonder" gives us quivers:
Bradbury, Blish—all the rest
Send us to the cuckoo's nest.

It's a fanzine war—we know!
'Cause Nekromantikon tells us so.
But our spooks soar and hover—
Every thrill for the morbid lover.

We're not meanies backing water—
Ye mercenary pause with quarter:
Zombies, vampires, sirens, ghouls—
Mail a dime for "Shivers," fools!

—Hospital Corps School, P&A, U.S. Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, Virginia.

What's with these movie adjectives you and Shelvick use, H. S.? We wait with baited breath for the word *poignant* in some forthcoming epistle. That's the one that sets us to battering our shrieking head against walls, much like that old World-Telegram copy reader in one of H. Allen Smith's giggle tomes, who used to dance on the tables in rage whenever a rewrite man slipped the word *ergo* into his copy.

Poignant! Just thinking of it gives us the yammering fantods.

Cuckoo, cuckoo, little Weatherby,
We can tell you where we'd rather be
Than making echo of your rhymes—
Send us, please, to balmier climes!

And since you're including Mae West in your list of women authors, what's the matter with Gypsy Rose Lee? Remember MOTHER FINDS A BODY and its sequel? They had their—er, points of—er, literary merit.

MESSAGE FROM A HYPECRIT
by A. J. Budrys

Dear Sir: Being a fairly busy man, and being of a hypercritical turn of mind, I have in the past refrained from inflicting too many of my vituperations on overburdened editors. Moreover, I'm composing directly into the typewriter. If, therefore, the organization of this letter gets a little blurry at times, please bear with me.

The cause of this flowering into type is the April, 1950, TWS in general, and John D. MacDonald's "Journey for Seven" in particular. I have read your magazines for what, on reflection, seems to be an incredibly long time. A lot of stf has flowed under the bridge. I have followed your general improvement with deep interest and much private comment, some of it admittedly unprintable. On the whole, I have never regretted the money spent and at times I was tempted to send you a couple of dollars more than the purchase price. (Rest assured, such insanity was but fleeting.)

The issue of TWS under discussion follows the pattern of the previous volume in that the novelets were generally good and the short stories were generally well written but poorly motivated or plotted. Some day I intend to cut loose on Ray Bradbury's recent assumption that he can get away with poor basic ideas if he camouflages them with his highly emotional and slightly over-written style, but for the nonce I'll spare you.

To resume the assault on Mr. MacDonald:

"J. D. MacDonald" sounds like another name for H. Beam Piper, but that is a side issue. The practise of signing your poorer works with another name galls me, but it's ethical. Whether or not I'm wide of the mark here is relatively unimportant. If I'm wrong the following remarks remain unaffected and if I'm right it lends that much strength to the club. To wit:

The main assumption of "Journey" is that superhardness of the skin, and that hardness, is sufficient to make a *super being of the ordinary human being.* Nowhere does the author endow his characters with more than that. I was faintly surprised that you bought and published the story in that form.

In the first place, had such an accident actually occurred, the subjects would have been unable to move so much as an eyelid. They would have strangled within minutes, at most. Had they been able to move, they could never have been able to poke holes in the sides of the bus, for the same reason that you or I couldn't push a rod of tool steel through *the side of that same bus with the unaided power of our* bare hands.

The woman who was struck by the truck would most certainly have been killed, despite her super skin, for nothing was said about bracing her internal organs against sudden acceleration. The man who had such difficulty shaving should certainly have thought of a far more easy solution than pulling out each individual hair. Heat of ignition has nothing to do with hardness or tensile strength. I could go on like this for reams, but I doubt if that is required.

MacDonald's *failure to give his characters the super-*strength they would need to bend their super-skin was astonishing. Had he done so, of course, the results would have been just as disastrous to the credibility of the tale, for his unfortunate characters would have been unable to walk normally or even move a muscle without serious damage to their internal structure.

In other words, there may be a guiding hand somewhere shaping our destinies, but it was not around when MacDonald needed it most. Some day he may write a good story, if *he exists as an individual,* or *else Piper will do it for him.* When that happens I will be glad to worship at his altar. Meanwhile, my comments remain vituperative.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that while I have thrown a number of bricks, I will gladly apologize in capital letters if someone can prove me wrong in any particular. I just happen to like my stf credible, readable and open and aboveboard. Any questions?—220 Shoreward Drive, Great Neck, L. I., N. Y.

All right, A. J., here goes. One page 60 of our April issue, column two, Tom Bellbight is hypothesizing what must have happened to the people in the bus when the ray accidentally touched them. He is talking to a colleague, Dickinson, and says the following—

"I have a hunch that the beam had no effect on inanimate substances but that through some freak of luck, or bad luck, it speeded the whirl of electrons in all animate substances within range. So it's not too hard to figure the effects. It would affect function and muscle tone. Enormously powerful people with a structure like the finest tool steel. Teeth like diamonds."

Perhaps, as has too often been implied, we are out of our so-called mind—but to us that means a complete organic change which would not affect one part or function of the body in relation to any others. Certainly it does not imply, as you seem to have understood it, a mere hardening of the skin. Once the author's intended assumption is accepted his characters become wholly credible—physically at any rate.

FEATURE STUFF
by Robert Silverberg

Dear Mr. Mutton: Some three or four of my past letters, all rating the stories and duly discussing same, have been used for lining of the wastebasket. Therefore, in this letter, I'll not mention the stories but instead discuss the features of the mag.

First, the editorial. I have seen little praise of your mature, intelligent editorials in TRS and TEV. They show a knowledge of science and history and are well written. Oddly enough, the highest praise of these editorials appeared in one of your competitors, in a column reviewing fanzines! That note

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was quite amazing to me. I like the "Next Issue" review.

The interior art: I hate to say this, but I'm building up a terrific resistance to Stevens. His new style was good at first, but I'm getting tired of his heavy-line shading and shocked nudes (pp. 18, 117). Astarita seems to be improving, and Finlay is, of course magnificent. Who did the pic on p. 105? Looks like someone new.

We come next to The Reader Speaks. I've discovered that this is now the oldest continuous reader's department in stf. The R.S. first appeared early in 1929 (June or July) in SCIENCE WONDER STORIES, your lineal grandfather. The formerly oldest first appeared in late 1926, but I now find that after not being present in the mag throughout most of 1929, that particular rival has changed the name of its letter column to "Readers' Forum." Hail, TRS!

I like the letters occasionally. I think your poems are great, your answers complete and interesting. The type is a bit too small, but of that I complain not. More letters that way! If you'll notice, one of your newer competitors is under some idea that Sargeant Saturn is still around in the column.

And now, the fanmag reviews. I'm sorry, but I disagree with you heartily on this point. Any fanmag, despite its crudities, has no business being panned as strongly as you sometimes do. You destroy its circulation with your acid comments on the B-List and in The Frying Pan.

With that, Mr. "Mutton," I bid thee a fond farewell.—760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, New York.

Aren't we something? Well, we have to let some soft-soap leak in once in awhile, if only for balance. As for the *Frying Pan*—well, more than once we have panned nothing at all therein—as witness the Robert Bloch piece some time back. We are not out to hurt—but when something doesn't add up at all we say so. Of what earthly use is a column devoted to nothing but praise? We are no hammer guy, since we bend over back to laud fan efforts. They deserve it, if only for the fact they are made at all. But when they are poor we're going to keep right on saying so. It's up to you chaps to improve them, just as it is up to us to do what we can with our magazines in the onward-and-upward direction. (perish the thought!).

THE VERSE ONE
by Betsy Curtis

Dear Editor: You've here some hundred lines
Of mediocre verse which were inspired
By "Madness' Carnival" of Bradbury
And with some reader seek an audience.
Pray clasp them to your breast, or print them in
"The Reader Speaks"; but don't consign to flame
This loving labor—rather send it on
To Bradbury, who may appreciate
A little tribute to his artistry.
Enclosed's an envelope for forwarding.

* * * *

Dozing one night in parapsychic trance
Over the pages of some curious book,
I woke to find a black wind and a cold
Signal the presence of a time machine,
Whose glimmering, spinning brilliance fell to rest
Ere I could hap to stand or wisely flee.
Then from a close-tooled portal issued out
No obvious horror with a bulbous skull,
But youth, well-combed, with peevish pouting mouth
Who glanced about with distaste manifest,
And, seeing me alone, gave forth these words:

"Well, stupid being of the stupid past,
Come, help me out, give me a pack of books.
I have no time to waste. I must be back
For an examination in an hour.
Speak! Tell me, what was Bradbury?
His dates, his birthplace, and his genetics?
Come; list his major works and publishers!"

"Why, Bradbury's a friend—I know him well
From reading what he's written; but you ask
For facts that seem to me irrelevant.
Can it be true that in your future world
With time machines and bright technology
You've banned strange books, burned up the fairy tales?
And lost of Ray all knowledge but his name?
Tell me," I asked, "for he will want to know."

"Perish the thought! He shines amid the stars
That light those shrines, the public libraries,
Where, one day browsing in the catalogue,
I came upon his name by some mischance
And by worse error mentioned it in class;
Whereon our wise professor snapped it up,
Assigning me at once to long research,
A thesis with examinations too. I hurried back
And looked the reference up. In that same book
There was a picture of a time machine,
Which seemed a quick solution to my job
(The theory's simple); I made one and came
To get my facts from Bradbury's own day.

"Tell Ray we never had to burn the books;
And if his faith be justified, somewhere
Apart, thronging the mists of Venus' shores
Or marching down the desolate plain of Mars,
Blind Homer leads blind Milton through the press
To feast amid the topless towers of Oz,
Where Mary Shelley pours th' ambrosial cup
For Alice, Poe, young Hamlet and the rest.

"There was no need of antiseptic fire
To cleanse the aether of our shiny world;
For we have schools and noted lecturers
To disinfect our swift-maturing minds—
Tell us the two-fold tale from infancy
Of holy dullness, dullness sanctified.
Great works, we learn, are dull and hard to read,
Empty of matter which appeals to us
Who are not great, but only strong and clean.

"Eric Knight, Cabell, gentle Chesterton
Are laid in state upon their special shelves,
Devoutly dusted, perfect, and unread.
I know their names, of course, from years at school:
My best examinations cited them
(Cited, not quoted, you must understand).
The names, the dates, the works we learn, and one
Brief line—"Quotation typical."
Therefore our knowledge gaps must be filled up
Lest we should lack in reverence for the great.
Give me those facts about Ray Bradbury,
And I'll be back to that age whence I came."

Then did I smile and chided my young guest,
"If you had read your story with more care,
You'd find that a return is impossible
To your own time, your lost continuum.
But come, another time-stream may await
The fruits of your discoveries in our day.
Behold my treasure—this, my library."

And as I showed him round the groaning shelves,
Bright forms be-snared his eye, he caught my arm.
"Hold, what are these, these battered magazines
With covers vile, in execrable taste?"

"They are your reference books, fall to, read up.
Between these covers lives great Bradbury."
He took one gingerly, and at my desk
With pad and pencil preparation made
To abstract data from the living page.

* * * *

He read absorbed; and as I hovered round
I said, "Young man, I noticed in your speech
Inherent poetry, inheritance
Of man as man that will not be bred out:
Dreams are not dead nor lofty fantasy,
And tales will leave you with a thirst for more
Till, like me, you will never give them up."

He did not hear me, and I softly left
Him writing letters to the editor.

—201 Veterans Village, Canton, New York.

For once we do not intend even an attempt at a reply in kind. Betsy, you've slaughtered us! Rest assured we shall gladly publish any letters your futureman elects to send our way. Perhaps you could even con him into writing a story or six?

GRATTING RATING
by Ronald H. Stone

Dear Ed.: When, in the course of stf events, TWS brings out a Bradbury story, the fen are happy. It is time, then, to compose a missive to the editor to tell him how we feel. Very well, then, I liked it.

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Now to more or less rate the stories.

I use a 1 to 10 scale, 10 being almost impossibly good, 1 almost impossibly poor.

"Planet of the Small Men"—Leinster—7.5. Who says the space opera is gone? Good writing, fair idea.

"Journey for Seven"—MacDonald—7.0. Idea is just about *the oldest in stf (Superman, yet) but for some reason* I kind of liked it. Maybe it was the masterful writing.

"There Shall Be No Darkness"—Blish—8.0. The sort of thing I like. Fantasy vs. Modern Science. The werewolf is merely an endocrine deficiency. Hmmmmnn—must think about it. An idea thrown out to some enterprising author—how would an old-fashioned vampyre do against a telepathic mutant?

"Nocturne"—West—7.6. Maybe it's because I like music.

"Little Joe"—Cartmill—4.0. Uh-Uh. This is getting stale. I *like most series stories, but this one just didn't hit me right.*

"The Time Cave"—Sheldon—2.0. Ouch! Story, plot old; not enough writing to save it. Don't think too much of these short-shots anyway. Still, the plot was a little too stale.

"The Borghese Transparency"—Sprague—5.0. Kind of mediocre. Nothing especially good; nothing too bad. About average for most stf mags, not too hot for TWS.

"Carnival of Madness"—Bradbury—9.999999. I have principles against using a 10, so carry out that figure to a few more places.

Any further talk would spoil this, so—

Please keep up the club listings. Add on the Central New York Science-Fantasy Society, also, please. Interested parties should get in touch with me.—Utica Road, R.D. No. 1, Clinton, New York.

Okay, fair enough, Ron. Better send us a separate fanclub listing for the December TWS lists. Luck with your stf activities.

BACK TO LUBEC
by Ed Cox

Dear Editor: It's Lubec's one and only leprechaun writing *again. Glad?*

The April 1950 TWS appeared, was duly bought and read which inspires the following comments, which yours truly hopes may be of some worth for some reason or other.

Continuing the idea of definite types and branches of s-f stories we find an almost completely different bunch this time. Leading off is Leinster's typical type. How he does it I dunno—but in each story of this type he plops into our laps a number of "new" (well, yes, new) super-scientific *weapons, gadgets and such. I thought he did pretty good* in his Kim Randall series. Now this! A thoroughly enjoyable yarn but not for book publication later, methinks.

A greatly different branch of the s-f story, which is quite prominent now, is John D. MacDonald's yarn. I rather favor it for the top spot in this issue. His approach and handling are so much better than anything else I've read and nothing *has come close to this theme. He sure had me fooled!*

I thought the beam changed the bus and other metals and fabrics, not the people! And that wind-up! I did sorta get the drift of the end-results when the men from New Mexico were first mentioned. Only one thing bothering me about this story. Would the food give the same amount of nourishment to the new body structure? Something like that.

James Blish *turns out another good one.* Can't see how it fits into an s-f magazine, except that this one suggests a scientific reason for lycanthropy. I imagine you'll hear a lot of squawks. But the story was good, so who cares if it is a stretch of the imagination to be calling it s-f? Liked it a lot.

I consider MacDonald and Blish two swiftly soaring stars in the s-f firmament; Keep 'em rolling!

Before continuing let me at least applaud your generous *use of the work of Paul Orban. Sure looks nice to see him* working in TWS. I notice he used both styles too. If the paper were smoother and the plates sharper it would be perfect.

Bradbury did a refreshing piece of wizardry this time out. Refreshing in that it varied the almost inevitable Martian theme. Although I realize now that the continuous Martian setting is but to emphasize the human and his foibles etc.

The Murchison saga continues. This reaches back closer to *those "buckety-buck" days you mention but I loved it!* The item wasn't too-well titled. Little Joe wasn't characterized enough to bring out the inhuman fiend of a hellion that he was supposed to be.

Wallace West, welcome again, had a bit of alien atmosphere in this yarn of his but the background stuff didn't jibe too well. I mean, the routine in the ship itself seemed more *like it was in a cabin-cruiser or a train or something. Hardly* ship-shape spaceship system this! But the basic idea of *the story wasn't bad.* It sold, didn't it? I guess I may as well admit that I liked "Lure of Polaris" a heck of a lot better than this. This yarn could be called, in musician's terminology, "thin."

Sheldon's piece of trivia seemed that to me. Or did I miss something tremendous in concept, neatly tucked away somewhere in this short short?

The Sprague (de Camp?) item was an enjoyable moment or two, with the time spent *reading but not re-reading. Tell* me, frens, do you also judge a story these days by trying to figure whether it could rate as hard-cover material?

Thanks for the info about making up a prozine. It is really enlightening and I did want to know. Thanx again.

All in all a meaty and satisfying issue this time. I might add a few after-thoughts, such as—Leinster's idea of the galaxy being a *glorified picnic ground for unarmed earth* explorers; then to find a vicious race of chlorine-breathers, super-intelligent runts, etc. Gad! Then J. D. Mac's (god, hope MacDonald doesn't detest that if he happens to read this) very good ". . . graves open at both ends, commonly called a rut." He can make money in "The Readers' Digest" with that! Your own ". . . beefcake . . ." wasn't bad *either.*

Glad to see Jones coming up again. And the Space Salvage Series finale, huh? Hokay. *And Gallun also is back!* These stalwarts of bygone days all coming back is good. Like to see more of Burks too. About time for more Brackett too. And van Vogt. And—okay, you're running this mag, I'll simmer down.—4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine.

Well, you're in amiable mood, Ed, for which, praise Allah! We wouldn't know about the food-business, As for the West space-ship routine, how in heck do we know what it will be like when it gets going? It may well be yachtlike. Humans have a gift for making themselves comfortable as well as the reverse.

Carter Sprague is *not* Sprague de Camp, once and for all. It is a nom de plume for someone entirely different. And it is one which has appeared in slick magazine articles and literally scores of fiction stories in the past dozen years or so—though it is fairly recent in stf. Our "beefcake" crack was far from original—it's an oldie in Hollywood by this time. Just male cheesecake, that's all. Hope you like succeeding issues.

NOT UP TO SNUFF
by Don J. Nardizzi

Dear Ed.: Your April issue was not up to snuff—but I suppose we must expect an occasional stinkeroo with the pipperoos. However your editorial was real meat. Enjoyed it. As to the stories, as I have said, not par.

You must curb this tendency toward the horror and supernatural. Blish's tale, however good for its field, was out of place in an stf magazine. And you are an stf mag, aren't *you? Witches, goblins and warlocks are the antitheses of* science, so please, leave us not confuse the issues. (The word issues is meant as a double-entendre.)

You ask for comments on stories and you ask for poetry. I guess we'll have to give you both. First let me thank all the fans who so kindly praised my Hiawatha effort. It was nothing, really. (All right, Ed., stop nodding assent.) Here are some comments:

On planet of midgets
To sojourn I'd leifer
Where ladies are brief and
Their costumes are briefer.

In "Journey for Seven"
A startling mutation
A pass at Miss Sanger
Would bring you vexation.

"There Shall Be No Darkness"
Out here that is fine
For wolves mostly gather
At Hollywood-Vine.

In Bradbury's "Carny"
The witches did brew some
Of horror and suspense
Which grew some, but gruesome.

The one I liked best was—
"Nocturne" *wherein Shelley*
Stood nude in the canebrake
Right up to her stomach.

All right, so her name was Sheila. But it wouldn't have

(Concluded on page 162)

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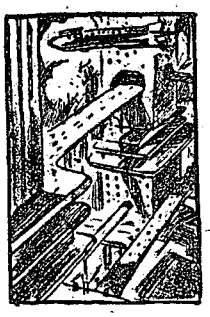

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

MASTERS OF TIME by A. E. van Vogt, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania ($3.00).

This volume is actually a pairing off of two short novels by the master of stf paradox, of which the title story is the first and slightly longer and is followed by THE CHANGELING.

In MASTERS OF TIME the title states the theme, which involves recruiting down through past ages of soldiers needed to maintain both sides in a colossal interplanetary struggle of the far-distant future. Its two central figures, Norma Matheson, an embittered and spinsterish career girl, and Jack Garson, the young scientist whose love she once spurned in favor of independence, become caught in the machinations of Dr. Lell, whose job is to see that Delpa, besieged Earth city, does not fall to the Planetarian forces.

Norma and Jack, as they become more and more inextricably enmeshed in time future, past and present, are unpleasantly confused to discover that they seem indubitably to be on the wrong side. Each is forced to comply with Dr. Lell's sinister plans to protect the other, yet each manages to rebel.

Jack goes through the depersonalizing machines, which are supposed to make near-robot cannon-fodder of him without losing his mind—and Norma discovers the secret of the key which holds her in Dr. Lell's power. From then on paradox piles on paradox, like Ossa on Pelion, until, in solving their personal problems, the two central characters solve the problems of all time.

THE CHANGELING tells us of Lesley Craig, middle-aged general manager of the Nesbitt Company, who one morning discovers himself to have shed a good twenty years in appearance and just about all of his non-recent memories.

Before he can solve the puzzle he is kidnaped by women hirelings of the President of the United States, discovers that his wife, Anrella, is apparently part of a conspiracy which intends to use who and whatever he is for some highly suspicious purpose and that—most puzzling of all—he was apparently a World War One leg amputee yet is perfectly whole of body.

It is upon this last puzzle and that of his missing memory that the story hinges. We aren't going to tell you any more, since to do so would be to rob an intricate and generally fascinating puzzle of its mystery.

All in all a pair of excellent wartime van Vogts in a single well-bound and printed package. The maestro is facile, entertaining, ingenious and occasionally exciting. He and Fantasy Press should do well with this one—or rather two.

THE ETERNAL CONFLICT and THE LADY DECIDES by Dr. David H. Keller, Prime Press, Philadelphia ($3.50 apiece).

These two rather short volumes represent the most ambitious printing, binding and packaging job yet attained by any of the so-called fantasy publishers. They are, in short, collectors' items every step of the way. We congratulate the master of Prime Press on their ability to make such books.

Dr. Keller, too, deserves congratulations for his texts although not quite such fulsome ones. Since, this month, the stories for review seem to come in pairs, let us again take the longer story first, in this instance THE ETERNAL CONFLICT.

This is fantasy of the purest school—of the school which James Branch Cabell has made famous among American authors during the past forty-odd years. It is briefly a biography of the Woman, daughter of the Moon Goddess made famous by classicists from Sappho to Robert Graves, who seeks to be something different, something a trifle less animal than she is.

Thus it is in reality the story of all women, with their kindnesses, their fantastic attraction, their eerie foibles and the appalling cruelties resulting from complete self-preoccupation, their ultimate unioa

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with lesser creatures in final defeat. All of this is couched in the spellbinding simplicity of Arthurian—or rather Cabellian—prose and legend, to say nothing of arcane sex symbolism.

THE LADY DECIDES is antipodially different in theme and period if not in mood, which is a recreation in modern clothes of the troubadour culture of pre-Renaissance Spain and Provence under the guidance of the Avignon popes.

Henry Cecil, of the Georgia Cecils, suh, gladly tosses away his considerable corn-pone-and-magnolia heritage in favor of wandering the dusty roads of Spain with a lute in search of a maiden kept captive in a cruel master's tower. He is a sort of anachronistic Gary Davis in romantic and melancholy revolt against the strictures of twentieth-century existence, content merely to compose and sing his songs and live from day to day, from moment to moment, while his search continues.

Curiously enough, in Angelica Gunsaulis, who poses as a shepherd maiden to meet him, he finds his sleeping beauty—although there is a hint of rehearsal in her slumber. He also finds Beatrice Casanova, who quickly makes up her mind and is willing to wait with the patience of Penelope.

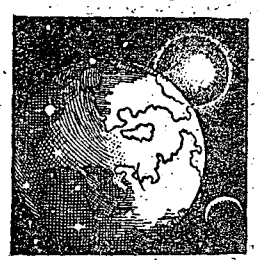
However, to win his maiden after the wooing he must sell himself to the ways of trade—in this instance the olive export business at which he proves damnably adept. Ultimately, even in victory, the prosaic requirements of life keep shackling him until, at last, the inevitable breakdown comes.

This is in no way stf—but it has its own magic, perhaps more so than its mate, and the author never once betrays his theme or his hero, letting life itself take care of the latter for him.

In both of these too-brief books Dr. Keller has woven spells of a high order—yet spells reared on a psychologically sound base.

If THE LADY DECIDES, in its Borrowesque, Rolandesque whimsy, is perhaps more successful than Dr. Keller's creation of his own Poictesme in THE ETERNAL CONFLICT, yet the latter's very near-success in this most difficult of fantasy byways should be accolade enough.

THE SEASON'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION



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The FRYING PAN

A Fanzine Commentary

ONE of the stand-bys of fandom is the open letter. Why no one ever seems to write a closed letter is a mystery whose depths we have yet fully to plumb. But come fan organizations, come fanzines, go both with the passing of time, the open letter remains.

We have come to wonder recently if hoary fans, aware of their dangerous dotage, don't gather about them the acolytes, neophytes and tyros of their respective groups and, speaking never above a whisper, pass on in various sancta sanctorum the causes, methods and mood of the open letter.

We say "mood" in the singular advisedly —for open letters have but one mood, that of anguished and astonished resentment. View with alarm, point with pride, demand with or-elses? Not fandom's open letters. They just go on resenting and resenting and resenting.

A fine fruity and occasionally quasi-literate example has just turned up upon our desk and we are reprinting it in toto—save for suitable disguising of the name and places involved. If only for the record we think the open letter, after so many and unvaried apparitions, deserves this prozine reward. Here goes—

OPEN LETTER

to members of the Otterid Science Fantasy League and to members of the Calcimine Insurgents

Several months ago three people, all from East Swayback—A. Trapp, Al Flute and L. L. Goober—resigned from the

[*Turn page*]

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Ganichim Science Fantasy Society because, so they said, there were too many "juvenile acting" members in that particular organization. Since most of the remaining active members were in Otterid and since there already was a very active fan club operating in Otterid, the OSFL, the GSFS was dissolved. At that time the East Swayback fen stated that at such time as the Otterid people could show that they were grown up, they would then consider rejoining the group.

Some time after this, these same East Swayback fen organized themselves into a group they call the Calcimine Insurgents. Even though they seemed to think that the Otterid group was beneath their notice we see that they are coming down to a good many of our meetings, regardless of the weather.

At the last meeting which they attended they brought with them a publication that they had written and printed. To say the least, this said publication (term used for want of a better word) contained material that was untrue, indecent and libelous about persons most of whom they didn't even know. Apparently they had gotten their names from the club paper. "The Otterid Stfan" which we had been sending them.

It seems incredulous to us that a person of A. Trapp's caliber could have had a hand in such matters. A. Trapp, who many of us have rated as Ganichim's number I fan and who holds the position of chairman of the NFFF Directorate, has always been a steady-going clear-thinking fellow helping fandom grow. We who have considered A. Trapp our friend and had thought he was ours are beginning to wonder. The only thing that seem possible is that he must have been influenced by unsound advice and actions of other members of the Calcimine Insurgents.

We are thankful that our constitution is so written that it protects us and allows us time to become acquainted with the prospective members before they are admitted to the League and to eliminate those whose conduct is detrimental to the well being and/or the name of the League.

We would like an explanation from A. Trapp of his part in the juvenile antics of the Calcimine Insurgents as it seems unlikely that he knowingly and willingly took part in their last escapade. Until such time that the other members of the Insurgents can show us that they are becoming mature fen and are no longer "juvenile jerks" (their own terminology in regard to the GSFS) they will not be welcome at any of our meetings.

Let us examine this magnificent missive and/or closely. Obviously it has been carefully conceived and shrewdly balanced between justified resentment, veiled threats, subtle aggression and forgiveness, culminating in an ultimatium which surely is calculated to send any true and/or untrue ex-GSFS-er screaming and rending his zipper jacket out into the thirsty Otterid salt flats.

First, in dignified (not to say downright stuffy) prose the drafters of this momentous epistle with no envelope on top state the cause of the recent schism, the inexorable course of events that brought about civil war in Otterid, the angry parting words with their concealed multiple-fire olive branch.

In item No. 2 coals are heaped on the

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

SHADOW ON THE SAND

A Novel of Twin Worlds

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

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fire, which is already in danger of getting out of control. First the maverick East Swaybackites have organized themselves into a splinter group. And then neither snow nor rain nor dark of night seems to stay these scurriers from coming to the meetings of the parent group.

Comes item No. 3—and/or the onrushing golgotha-climax. The Insurgents use (or rather abuse) such a meeting for the passing of a "said" publication containing false, lewd and/or slanderous crud about the parent group. Including "persons most of whom they didn't even know." Heck, maybe they didn't want to.

Now, with the outrage on record, our letter-opener—p a r d o n, open-letterer—moves obliquely to the attack. Coyly sidling (or/and seideling) up to the VIP among the Calciminors, one A. Trapp, he proceeds first to feed him ego-boo—then with sublety to hint that maybe he doesn't know that his Insurgent pals of East Swayback are busily working on his back with a buzzsaw.

This is known as the "divide and/or rule" theory, exemplified by L. Sprague de Camp in the book of the same name (or/and approximately the same). Mr. Trapp is offered a shapely and not-too-fatted calf if he will come back to the fold, leaving his fellow East Swaybackians in the outer

[*Turn page*]

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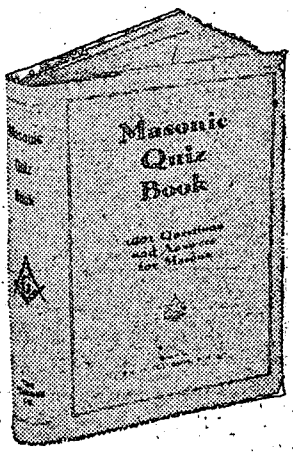

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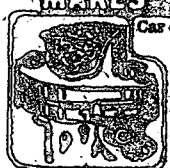

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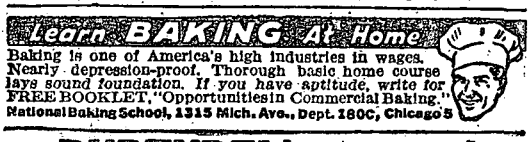
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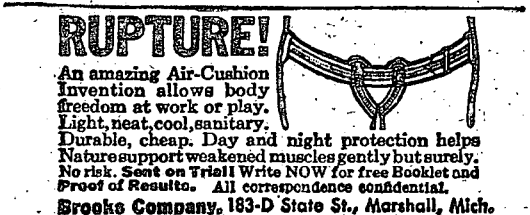
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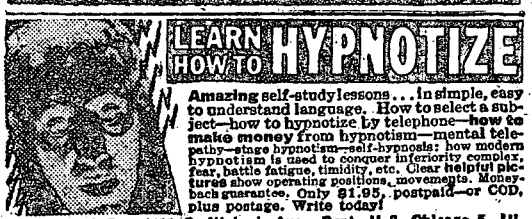
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darkness where—it here implies—they belong.

Judging by the past events as expressed in the open missive, someone must have been doing some hasty rewriting of the Otterid Science Fantasy League constitution—which also implies protection for Mr. Trapp against any further buzzsawing by his erring East Swaybackians should he desire to take up the proffered calf, etc.

Finally, so as not to look overeager, the author or/and authors of this epistle demand an explanation from Mr. Trapp (surely he should be able to tell them it all happened while he was out on location or/and he didn't know it was loaded). Then, in a magnanimous gesture, the parent group offers to take all the Insurgents back, provided they will reverse their own tables on the "juvenile jerk" issue.

This is casting the shoe on the other hoof with a vengeance. The gauge is also cast and/or the gauntlet is down. Someone is going to have to eat seagull. We wait, breathlessly, for the next episode to occur.

Seriously, if one can get serious about such a three-dimensional doodle, we wonder if more closed and fewer open letters might not make stfandom a much more generally respected body. But don't get us wrong—we love 'em.

—THE EDITOR.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Concluded from page 156)

rhymed. So long.—5107 Delaware Avenue, Los Angeles 41, California.

Okay, okay—so we're stuck with another hunk of verse right in the tired old finale. Well, let's crank her up and get wheezing, to wit—

You didn't like our April ish?
You thought the stories smelly
E'en with MacDonald, Brad and Blish?
We'll hang one in your abdominal cavity, bub!

Which is very definitely that. This column's done and so are we. But thanks, all of you, for contributing the letters that, more than anything else, make the column possible—or should we say impossible? At any rate, thanks, and we'll be seeing you in the September SS and back at this stand come October.

—THE EDITOR.

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- Will measure the *actual current consumption* of any appliance or utility either A.C. *or* D.C. and will measure it *while the unit is in operation*: The reading will be direct in amperes. The appliance or utility may be plugged directly into the front panel receptacle. A special pair of insulated clip-end leads is included for motors, etc.
- Will measure the actual voltage and indicate whether the current is A.C. or D.C. and if the frequency is 25 cycles or 60 cycles.
- Incorporates a sensitive direct-reading resistance range which will accurately measure all resistances commonly used in electrical appliances, motors, etc. This range will enable continuity checks and tests for shorts and opens.
- Will indicate excessive leakage between a motor and a line up to 10 Megohms.
- Will indicate when a three-phase motor is running erratically due to a "blown" fuse.
- Will test Thermostats under *actual working conditions.*
- Is the ideal trouble-shooter as it will instantly locate opens, shorts and grounds.
- Will test all bulbs, radio tube filaments, pilot light lamps, all fuses including cartridge, screw, etc., fluorescent bulbs, etc.

SHIPPED ON APPROVAL

NO MONEY WITH ORDER—NO C.O.D.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY! Yes, you need send no money with order or pay anything on delivery. Simply fill out this order form and mail it today. Try the Model 50 for 10 days. If completely satisfied, remit $13.90. If not, return the instrument — no explanation necessary.

The Model 50 Utility Tester comes housed in a round cornered molded bakelite case. Complete with all test leads and operating instructions — only . . .

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